DAVID HUME'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS RELIGION AS EVIDENCED BY HIS LIFE AND WORK

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Preface

This thesis presents the results of research on the life and work of David Hume in respect to his attitude towards religion. The method of interpretation used in this study was one which sought to combine biographical information concerning the man of letters with statements made in his writing. My procedure has not been merely a critical examination of Hume's works but rather an attempt to determine the kind of man he was and what his literary and religious intentions were. I have endeavored to discover the proper interpretation of his religious attitude in the light of his contribution to man's knowledge.

The spelling and punctuation used throughout this work, with the exception of direct quotations which are true to the source, follow standard American usage.

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor John Macmurray for suggesting the subject of this study and encouraging me throughout its execution. His continued interest, insights and assistance were instrumental in the completion of the dissertation. I am also indebted to Principal John Baillie whose advice and helpful suggestions have been gratefully adopted.

For the rest, I should like to express my gratitude to the library staff of the University of Edinburgh for its helpfulness.

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J. W. S.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations and short titles are used:

T: Hume's Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1896).

E: Hume's Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (2nd ed., Oxford, 1902).

G. G.: The Philosophical Works of David Hume, edd. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1874-1875).

A: Hume's An Abstract of a Treatise on Human Nature, ed. J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge, 1938).

D: Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. N. Kemp Smith (2nd ed., London, 1947).

Letters: The Letters of David Hume, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford, 1932).

New Letters: New Letters of David Hume, edd. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954).

CHAPTER I

HUME'S GUIDING PURPOSE

Introduction

The great Scottish philosopher, David Hume, is generally supposed to be a mere empiricist denying every kind of rational philosophy and metaphysics. By far the most wide-spread view of his philosophy is that it is identifiable with extreme scepticism. The assertion has often been made that Hume's thought exemplifies a vigorous development of the principles of Locke and Berkeley to their ultimate logical outcome. Hume is linked with his two immediate predecessors in a thought sequence which consequently forces one to interpret him as pre-eminently a destructive critic, anxious to destroy all faith in human knowledge. His primary concern is accepted as being the uprooting of the traditional and dominating philosophy of the time. Whenever this extreme view of Hume's work has been modified, the result has largely been the position that although his doctrine was a constructive effort based on Locke's principles, the sceptical conclusion simply serves as evidence of the inadequacy of such empirical systems.

In this introductory chapter we intend to survey some of the popular interpretations of Hume's position in the history of philosophy and to note the tendency in the past half century to raise objections against these widely held

views. In the light of recent re-interpretations of Hume's guiding purpose we believe that there is a need for a re-evaluation of Hume's attitude towards religion. Bruce M'Ewen in his "Introduction" to Hume's Dialogues has summarized very well the commonly held view when he writes, ". . . the easy, well-worn way of dealing with Hume's theology has been to rank his speculations as a side issue, to dub them 'Absolute Agnosticism' or 'Universal Scepticism,' and the reader, having been safely conducted up to the end of this philosophical cul-de-sac, is invited to retrace his steps and pursue his light-hearted journey by some other route."[1] In the course of this study, evidence will be presented for an alternative interpretation of Hume's basic religious attitude. We shall contend that a careful analysis of David Hume's life and works indicates that the traditional judgment concerning his position manifests not only a misunderstanding of the intention and outcome of his philosophy but also a misinterpretation, or possibly even an intentional misrepresentation, of what is central and most distinctive in his teaching.

Eighteenth Century Interpretation of Hume's Teaching

Unable to answer Hume's reasoning, critics levelled charges of scepticism, claiming that his empiricism if pushed far enough made positive knowledge impossible. One critic,

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[1]Bruce M'Ewen, Introduction to the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion by David Hume (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwell and Sons, 1907), pp. xiv-xv.

referring to Hume's discussion on "Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding" and "Sceptical Solutions of these Doubts" in the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, states that these doctrines "lead directly to a scepticism of an atheistical tendency, whose dangerous nature can require no comment, nor any apology for its refutation."[1] In his own day opponents of Hume advanced criticisms against him which were regarded as final refutations of his ideas. These estimates became widely accepted then and persist even now. The traditional view of Hume's philosophy rests, primarily, upon the continued acceptance of that interpretation which gained currency through the writings of Thomas Reid and James Beattie.

Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense was published in 1764 and his Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man in 1785. His attitude towards Hume's thought centers around an analysis of the treatment of the "doctrine of ideas" in the opening sections of the Treatise of Human Nature. In the "Dedication" introductory to the Inquiry Reid indicates the position he believes Hume advocates:

> I acknowledge, my Lord, that I never thought of calling in question the principles commonly received with regard to the human understanding, until the "Treatise of Human Nature" was published in the year 1739. The ingenious author of that treatise upon the principles of Locke--who was no sceptic--hath built a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather

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[1] [Anon], An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, Controverting the Doctrine of Mr. Hume, etc. (London: T. Hookham, 1824), p. 4.

than its contrary.[1]

Reid declares that the "doctrine of ideas" assumed by Descartes, Locke and Berkeley leads inevitably to a self-defeating scepticism; the logical conclusion is no world and no mind.

> Des Cartes no sooner began to dig in this mind, than scepticism was ready to break in upon him. . . . Malebranche and Locke, who dug deeper, found the difficulty of keeping out this enemy still to increase. . . . Then Berkeley, who carried on the work, despairing of securing all, bethought himself of an expedient:--By giving up the material world, which he thought might be spared without loss, and even with advantage, he hoped, by an impregnable partition, to secure the world of spirits. But alas! the Treatise of Human Nature wantonly sapped the foundation of this partition, and drowned all in one universal deluge.[2]

Reid believes Hume's theory is simply the logical consequence of the assumption underlying the philosophies of his predecessors that we know only our own sensations or ideas. Hume borrowed his basic principles from Locke and Berkeley and, with great acuteness, developed a system of absolute scepticism. As Reid sees it, the final result of Cartesian philosophy is the complete destruction of the basis of all knowledge.

In both the Inquiry and the Essays Reid has dealt almost exclusively with Book I of the Treatise. It appears that he considered any further writings beyond Book I to be either manifestations of this pernicious sceptical philosophy or simply sophistries. Since Hume's teaching is sheerly negative and in effect little more than a reductio ad absurdum

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[1]Thomas Reid, The Works of Thomas Reid, ed. Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1846), I, 95.

[2]Ibid., I, 103.

of the principles of his predecessors, we cannot expect to find any possible contributions to knowledge in the pages of the Treatise.

> The [author of the Treatise] proceeds upon the same principles [as Berkeley] , but carries them to their full length; and, as the Bishop undid the whole material world, this author, upon the same grounds, undoes the world of spirits, and leaves nothing in nature but ideas and impressions, without any subject on which they may be impressed.[1]

Reid contends that modern scepticism is the natural outcome of this system of thought.

Endeavouring to prove his interpretation, Reid quotes the Treatise mainly in connection with the denial of the self or the denial of the external world. He wishes to concentrate the reader's attention upon Hume's most extreme statements and suggests that these utterances give a true and appropriate expression of Hume's teaching. This one-sided presentation of Hume's ideas has been described by one of his defendants in the following way: "Reid's indictment of Hume--for, surely it is an indictment and not an eulogy--is twofold: first, that Hume's fundamental principles have been taken over in an uncritical manner from his predecessors Locke and Berkeley; and secondly, that though Hume has had the insight to recognize--this indeed is the sole merit which Reid allows to Hume--that they do not suffice in answering any of the questions to which philosophy seeks a solution, he has yet been content to rest in the sheerly sceptical self-

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[1] Ibid., I, 102.

destroying attitude to which he has thereby been committed."[1]

James Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism was published in 1770. In this work Beattie takes his principles and interpretation directly from Reid but fails to echo the politeness and respect for Hume's arguments which Reid had always manifested. Except for the fact that Beattie gives more direct and substantial quotations from the Treatise than Reid did, the Essay on Truth is scarcely more than a sequel to Reid's original criticism.[2] But since the Essay on Truth gained great popularity and influence,[3] it, more

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[1]Norman Kemp Smith, "David Hume: 1739-1939", Hume and Present Day Problems, Aristotelian Society Publications, Supplementary Volume XVIII (London: Harrison and Sons, Ltd., 1939), p. ix.

[2]E.g., "The substance, or at least the foundation of Berkeley's argument against the existence of matter, may be found in Locke's Essay, and in the Principia of Des Cartes . . . . Mr. Hume, more subtle, or less reserved, than any of his predecessors, hath gone still greater lengths in the demolition of common sense." [James Beattie, Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism (7th ed., London: J. Mawman, 1807), pp. 212-213.]

[3]The book was declared to be the favorite of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, and George III, and it was through Beattie's quotations from the Treatise that Kant was awakened from his dogmatic slumbers. [Cf. Norman Kemp Smith, Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. xxviii-xxix.] Kant objected that, "fate, ever unkind to metaphysics decreed that he [Hume] should be understood by nobody. One cannot observe without feeling a certain pain, how his opponents Reid, Oswald, Beattie and finally Priestley, so entirely missed the point of his problem. By always taking for granted what he was doubting and on the other hand proving, with violence and often with great unseemliness, what it had never entered his mind to doubt, they so mistook his hint as to how to improve matters that everything remained as it was, as if nothing had happened." [Immanuel Kant,

than any other work, determined the prevailing impression of the nature and effect of Hume's philosophy.

Beattie displays an extreme bitterness and moral condemnation towards Hume for having constructed his system. Incensed by the politeness and respect shown Hume by many of his antagonists, Beattie descends into invective:

> I could not approve that extraordinary adulation which some of them paid their arch-adversary. I could not conceive the propriety of paying compliments to a man's heart, at the very time one is proving that his aim is to subvert the principles of truth, virtue, and religion; nor to his understanding, when we are charging him with publishing the grossest and most contemptible nonsense. . . .
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> You are sensible, that . . . it is absolutely necessary for me to use great plainness of speech. My expressions must not be so tame as to seem to imply either a diffidence in my principles, or a coldness toward the cause I have undertaken to defend.[1]

Hume was subjected to contemptuous and arrogant treatment in the Essay on Truth. In the preface Beattie acknowledges:

> Ever since I began to attend to matters of this kind, I had heard Mr. Hume's philosophy mentioned as a system very unfriendly to religion both revealed and natural, as well as to science; and its author spoken of as a teacher of sceptical and atheistical doctrines, and withal

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Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to present itself as a Science, trans. Peter G. Lucas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), p. 7.]

In the Annual Register it is stated that Dr. Beattie "more than thirty years after the publication of that sceptical system [the Treatise], has been so successful as to obtain a pension by his Essay on the Immutability of Truth; in which he discovers all the violence of a sectary, and all the illiberality of a pedant, and rather abuses than confutes Mr. Hume." [(Anon), "An Account of the Life and Writings of the late David Hume, Esq; as given to the World in one of the periodical publications," in the Annual Register, XIX (1776), 28.]

[1]William Forbes, An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D., (Edinburgh, 1806), I, 131-132, 134-135.

> as a more acute and ingenious writer. I had reason to believe, that his arguments, and his influence as a great literary character, had done harm, by subverting or weakening the principles of some, and countenancing the licentious opinions of others. Being honoured with the care of a part of the British youth, and considering it as my indispensable duty (from which I trust I shall never deviate) to guard their minds against impiety, and error, I endeavoured, among other studies that belonged to my office, to form a right estimate of Mr. Hume's philosophy, so as not only to understand his peculiar tenets, but also to perceive their connection and consequences.[1]

Turning the full force of his polemic against Hume, Beattie writes:

> Had I done half as much as he, in labouring to subvert principles which ought ever to be held sacred, I know not whether the friends of truth would have granted me any indulgence; I am sure they ought not. Let me be treated with the levity due to a good citizen no longer than I act as becomes one.[2]
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> . . . One thing we certainly know: the fashion of sceptical systems soon passeth away. Those unnatural productions, the vile effusion of a hard ["and stupid" was deleted in the 1776 edition.] heart that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genius, and its own captiousness for sagacity of understanding, may, like other monsters, please a while by their singularity; but the charm is soon over: and the succeeding age will be astonished to hear, that their forefathers were deluded, or amused, with such fooleries.[3]
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> Away with this passion for system-building! it is pedantry: away with this lust of paradoxes!. it is presumption.[4]

Criticism of Hume's Motives

A similar attitude towards Hume has continued down to recent times. Expressed in more respectful terms, subsequent interpretations have, nevertheless, supported to one degree or another the original evaluation of Reid and Beattie. A

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[1] Beattie, op. cit., p. xxi. [2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] Ibid., pp. 442-443. [4] Ibid., p. 421.

familiar legend was developed which pictured Hume as manifesting intentions of a distinctly dishonorable kind. The questioning of Hume's motives, of his intellectual and moral integrity, began with some of his contemporaries. Dr. John Brown describes Hume as a writer "of our Times, bent upon Popularity and Gain," omitting "no Opportunity that offered, to disgrace Religion."[1] Brown continues:

> When this Gentleman found that his History, though larded with Irreligion, did not sell among the licentious; and that the serious were shocked at his Treatment of Religion, and on that Account were not Purchasers; he ordered his Agent (but too late) to expunge the exceptional Passages; assigning for the Reason of his avoiding every Thing of this Kind in his Second Volume, 'that he would not offend the Godly.' Now this very Man, in Defiance of all Decency, hath for several Years carried on a Trade of Essay-writing; in the Course of which he hath not only misrepresented, abused, and insulted the most essential Principles of Christianity, but, to the utmost of his Power, shaken the Foundations of all Religion. In these sorry Essays he had no Fear of offending the Godly, because he knew the Godly were not to be his Buyers: But when he finds that his History must sell among the Godly, or not sell at all; then comes the Panic upon him; then, forsooth, he will not offend the Godly. Here, therefore, a Character is clearly developed. With St. Paul, Godliness was Gain: But with this Man, Gain produceth Godliness.[2]

In a letter to Hume's publisher, Andrew Millar, Dr. William Warburton wrote: "You have often told me of this man's moral virtues. He may have many, for aught I know; but let me observe to you, there are vices of the mind as well as of the body: and I think a wickeder mind, and more obstinately bent on public mischief, I never knew."[3] James Boswell

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[1]John Brown, An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1758), I, 57.

[2]Ibid., I, 86-87.

[3]William Warburton, A Selection from Unpublished Papers

declares that "vanity, as a fascinating mistress, seized upon [Hume's] fondness, and never quitted her dominion over him,"[1] and that "his vanity made him publish treatises of skepticism and infidelity. . . ."[2] Boswell records that Dr. Samuel Johnson "holds Mr. Hume in abhorrence and left a company one night upon his coming in."[3] Dr. Johnson called Hume a blockhead and a rogue; and when Boswell mentioned Hume's assertion that "he was quite easy at the thought of annihilation," "He lied," retorted Johnson,

> He had vanity in being thought easy. It is more probable that he lied than that so very improbable a thing should be as a Man not afraid of death; of going into an unknown state and not being uneasy at leaving all that he knew. And you are to consider that upon his own principle of Annihilation he had no motive not to die.[4]

On another occasion Johnson spoke of Hume as a man

> . . . who has so much conceit as to tell all mankind that they have been bubbled for ages, and he is the wise man who sees better than they,--a man who has so little scrupulosity as to venture to oppose those principles which have been thought necessary to human happiness,--is he to be surprised if another man comes and laughs at him? If he is the great man he thinks himself, all this cannot hurt him: it is like throwing peas against a rock.[5]

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of the Right Reverend William Warburton, ed. Francis Kilvert (London, 1841), p. 310.

[1]James Boswell, The Hypochondriack, ed. by Margaret Bailey (Stanford University, 1928), II, 157.

[2]James Boswell, Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle, edd. Geoffrey Scott and Frederick A. Pottle (Priv. ptd., New York, 1928-34), XVI, 20.

[3]Ibid., I, 136. [4]Ibid., I, 128; XIII, 23.

[5]James Boswell, The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson (2nd ed., London: Charles Dilley, 1785), p. 21.

John Wesley records in his Journal that he "read over . . . Dr. Beattie's ingenious Inquiry After Truth. He is a writer quite equal to his subject, and far above the match of all the 'minute philosophers,' David Hume in particular--the most insolent dispiser of Truth and virtue that ever appeared in the world. . . . he is an avowed enemy to God and man, and to all that is sacred and valuable upon earth."[1]

In the nineteenth century the same thesis was restated, often in severe language. John Stuart Mill, for instance, describes Hume as possessing

> . . . powers of a very high nature; but regard for truth formed no part of his character. He reasoned with surprising acuteness; but the object of his reasoning was, not to obtain truth, but to show that it was unattainable. His mind, too, was completely enslaved by a taste for literature; not those kinds of literature which teach mankind to know the causes of their happiness and misery, that they may seek the one and avoid the other, but that literature which without regard for truth or utility, seeks only to excite emotion.[2]

T. H. Green traces the supposed defects in Hume's philosophy to faults in the writer's character:

> Few men of letters have been at heart so vain and greedy of fame as was Hume. In all other respects he learned to school his temper; but his appetite for applause was insatiable, and even his publisher had on occasion to rebuke the philosopher.[3]

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[1]John Wesley, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M., ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London, 1909-16), V, 458.

[2]John Stuart Mill, Review of George Brodie's History of the British Empire in the Westminster Review, II (1824), 346.

[3]T. H. Green, Introduction to the Philosophical Works of David Hume, edd. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1874-1875), I, 36.

> On reviewing the Treatise, he must have seen that the general result gave him a vantage-ground from which he could ply weapons of scepticism and irony in a novel and popular fashion; but if he maintained the earnest spirit of his youth, he must be content to remain unread. He selected for "recasting" precisely those portions which lent themselves to this manner, and which were likely to excite public attention.[1]

Green asserts that Hume was basically dishonest in his philosophical approach; he simply wanted to jeer at the traditional philosophy and theologians.

> It is not the fault of Hume but his merit that, in undertaking to maintain more strictly than others the identification of extension with feeling he brought its impossibility more clearly into view. The pity is that having carried his speculative enterprise so far before he was thirty, he allowed literary vanity to interfere with its consistent pursuit, caring only to think out the philosophy which he inherited so far as it enabled him to pose with advantage against Mystics and Dogmatists, but not to that further issue which is the entrance to the philosophy of Kant.[2]

T. H. Huxley expresses his assent to the Hume legend and comments on what he considers to be Hume's chief moral weakness:

> . . . Hume exhibits no small share of the craving after mere notoriety and vulgar success, as distinct from the pardonable, if not honourable, ambition for solid and enduring fame, which would have harmonised better with his philosophy. Indeed, it appears to be by no means improbable that this peculiarity of Hume's moral constitution was the cause of his gradually forsaking philosophical studies, after the publication of the third part (On Morals) of the Treatise, in 1740, and turning to those political and historical topics which were likely to yield and did in fact yield, a much better return of that sort of success which his soul loved.[3]

Even L. A. Selby-Bigge, the nineteenth century editor

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[1] Ibid., I, 76-77. [2] Ibid., I, 213.

[3] T. H. Huxley, Hume (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), p. 11.

of Hume's works, speaks of the Treatise as displaying "an occasional note of insincerity, arrogance or wantonness which strikes the serious student painfully." He declares that Hume included a lively and sceptical discussion of miracles and providence in the Enquiries because they "could hardly fail to find readers, attract attention, and excite that 'murmur among the zealots' by which the author desired to be distinguished;" these sections, Selby-Bigge contends, "may be ascribed to Hume's ambition to disturb 'the zealots' at all costs."[1]

Twentieth century criticisms are hardly less harsh. Vinding Kruse passes the following judgment upon Hume:

> Hume was a far more complex, versatile, and ambitious character, than, for instance, Kant or Spinoza. He combined two glaring contrasts: he was not only, like these, a great solitary thinker, knowing but one purpose, the realization of truth; he was, indeed, a man with many irons in the fire, a man with divers aims. And among these aims the realization of truth was not the most important; for Hume was possessed by literary ambition to such an extent that he set aside all considerations, even the consideration of truth, in order to win the favour of the public. For instance, it is well known that in his later life Hume time after time suppressed his most radical ideas in order to be better appreciated by the public, and it is characteristic that in his autobiography he describes the 'ruling passion' of his life not as a Spinoza would have done, as the urge of philosophical cognition, but love of literary fame.
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> And this literary ambition was not of the nature which was content with the immortality usually accorded to great thinkers by a late posterity; but, practical and concrete as he was, he craved first and foremost the admiration of his contemporaries. . . . And therefore he was consistently led to regard the judgement of the public

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[1]L. A. Selby-Bigge, Introduction to the Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals by David Hume (2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902, Impression of 1951), pp. x; xii; xviii.

as his supreme court, his only guide in his literary work.[1]

At an even more recent date John H. Randall, Jr. repeats the customary accusation that Hume was so bent upon immediate success that he was willing to seek it in unworthy ways after his failure to gain a hearing by legitimate means. The Treatise lacked the ideas which would gain notoriety, and so Hume turned his attention away from philosophy to theology and moral sciences. "Hume," Randall observes, "set as his goal precisely those usual surroundings of social life, the pleasures of the senses, riches, and fame. . . and he delighted all his life in setting forth his opinions diametrically opposite to those of his fellowmen. . . . Since he couldn't shock men by a new theory of science, he would try politics and religion."[2]

> This intellectual personality of Hume's makes clear why his thought is so elusive, why it is so difficult to emerge from his subtle dialectic with definite conclusions. He was wholly uninterested in building up a consistent position of his own, either a new theory of science or a new natural theology. Though the former is certainly implied in his thought, he was always ready to sacrifice it to the literary display of his dialectical skill. . . . He was interested, not in establishing a method and conclusions of his own but in commenting on the methods and conclusions of others. . . . Hume's whole attitude is: I don't for a minute believe it, any more than you do. But refute it if you can; I won't.
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> Hume employs this scepticism, not as a position to

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[1]Vinding Kruse, Hume's Philosophy in His Principal Work "A Treatise of Human Nature" and in His Essays trans. P. T. Federspiel (London: Oxford Press, 1939), p. 8.

[2]John H. Randall, Jr., "David Hume: Radical Empiricist and Pragmatist," in Freedom and Experience: Essays Presented to Horace M. Kallen, edd. Sidney Hook and Milton R. Konvitz (Ithaca and New York, 1947), p. 294.

be defended, but as a literary device.[1]

Predominance of the Traditional Interpretation

When Immanuel Kant read Beattie's quotations from the Treatise (some thirty-four years after its publication), it was the sceptical consequences of Hume's argument that gave a new turn to his thinking.[2] Scepticism was all that Reid and Beattie saw in Hume's philosophy. This attitude reappeared, almost unmodified in James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Alexander Bain, T. H. Green, T. H. Huxley, William Knight, and in the histories of literature and philosophy, such as those by Leslie Stephen, Wilhelm Windelband, and Johann Eduard Erdmann.

J. S. Mill speaks of Hume as disclosing an unduly sceptical attitude of mind. He contrasts Hume's sceptical teaching with the positive constructive teaching of Hartley and declares it was "a disadvantage to Hartley's theory, that its publication so nearly coincided with the commencement of the reaction against the experience psychology, provoked by the hardy scepticism of Hume."[3] In another work Mill writes: "In England, the philosophy of Locke reigned

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[1] Ibid., pp. 296-297.

[2] Kant, op. cit., pp. 5-12. The sceptical consequences which "interrupted [Kant's] dogmatic slumber" were those which follow upon acceptance of Hume's criticism of the supposedly self-evidence character of the causal maxim.

[3] John Stuart Mill, Introduction to the Analysis of the Human Mind by James Mill (2nd ed., London, 1869), I, xi-xii.

supreme, until a Scotchman, Hume, while making some capital improvements in its theory, carried out one line of its apparent consequences to the extreme which always provokes a reaction."[1] He notes "the negative, or destructive philosophers; those who can perceive what is false, but not what is true."

> France had Voltaire, and England (or rather Scotland) had the profoundest negative thinker on record, David Hume: a man, the peculiarities of whose mind qualified him to detect failure of proof, and want of logical consistency, at a depth which French sceptics, with their comparatively feeble power of analysis and abstraction, stopt far short of, and which German subtlety alone could thoroughly appreciate, or hope to rival.[2]

Alexander Bain accepts the assumption of his forebear, J. S. Mill, that Hume belongs entirely to the tradition of Locke and Berkeley and that he treats the common-sense belief in external bodies and in the self as fictitious and illusory. Bain regards Hume's analyses and conclusions as simply literary display. The arguments of the Treatise were a sort of reductio ad absurdum. But Hume, according to Bain, did not really believe in all seriousness the conclusions at which he arrived; he wrote philosophy with tongue in cheek.[3]

In the opening paragraph of his Introduction to Hume's Enquiries, L. A. Selby-Bigge writes:

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[1] J. S. Mill, Dissertations and Discussions (London: 1859), III,98.

[2] Ibid., III, 334-336.

[3] Alexander Bain, History of Mental and Moral Philosophy (London, 1863), II, 205, 207.

> Hume's philosophic writings are to be read with great caution. His pages, especially those of the Treatise, are so full of matter, he says so many different things in so many different ways and different connexious, and with so much indifference to what he has said before, that it is very hard to say positively that he taught, or did not teach, this or that particular doctrine. He applies the same principles to such a great variety of subjects that it is not surprising that many verbal, and some real inconsistencies can be found in his statements. He is ambitious rather than shy of saying the same things in different ways, and at the same time he is often slovenly and indifferent about his words and formulae. This makes it easy to find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all.[1]

T. H. Green in his Introduction to Hume's Treatise has virtually reduced Hume's philosophy to nothing. Interpreting Hume in the traditional manner, Green seeks to refute his philosophy and to discourage the study of it.

> Our business . . . has not been to moralize, but to show that the philosophy based on the abstractions of feeling, in regard to morals no less than to nature, was with Hume played out, and that the next step forward in speculation could only be an effort to re-think the process of nature and human action from its true beginning in thought. If this object has been in any way attained, so that the attention of Englishmen 'under five-and-twenty' may be diverted from the anachronistic systems hitherto prevalent among us to the study of Kant and Hegel, an irksome labour will not have been in vain.[2]

Green takes the opening sections of the Treatise as an adequate expression of Hume's central position. Hume has no set of positive beliefs; the sole legitimate outcome of his principles is an extreme self-destructive scepticism. Hume's chief characteristic, according to Green, lies in his more vigorous and logical application of the principles which he inherits from Locke and Berkeley; Hume is not significantly

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[1]Selby-Bigge, op. cit., p. vii.

[2]T. H. Green, op. cit., II, 71.

influenced by any other philosophers.[1] Green contends that both Locke and Hume are subjective idealists and that Hume is even more a subjective idealist than Berkeley.[2] There is a transition to Hume from Locke through Berkeley; and the systems of all three ultimately rest on the faith that the world, or existence, can be explained by intellectual activity. Hume, in Green's opinion, is a thorough sceptic, denouncing all belief in permanence, in identity, in activity, whether in a self or outside it. The common-sense beliefs in external bodies and in the self are fictions and illusions. All that exists are subjective states organized by association. Green completely ignores Hume's doctrine of natural belief and interprets him as a thorough-going associationist. Green presents Hume's doctrine of association in such a manner that it is not merely a description of the observed ways in which ideas are associated but a mechanism generating experience out of simple impressions.

> The vital nerve of [Hume's] philosophy lies [Green alleges] in his treatment of the "association of ideas" as a sort of process of spontaneous generation, by which impressions of sensation issue in such impressions of reflection, in the shape of habitual propensities, as will account, not indeed for their being--since they really are not--but for there seeming to be, those formal conceptions which Locke, to the embarrassment of his philosophy, had treated as at once real and creations of the mind.[3]

Much the same position is assumed by Green in his criticism of Books II and III of the Treatise. "In his speculations on morals, no less than on knowledge, Hume follows the

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[1] Ibid., I, 2-3; 131; 133; 238-239.

[2] Ibid., I, 5; 151. [3] Ibid., I, 162-163.

lines laid down by Locke."[1] In other words, Green assumes that Hume's moral philosophy, like his epistemology, is the logical consequence of Locke's principles.

The two Mills, Bain, Green, and Huxley support to one degree or another the Reid-Beattie evaluation and interpretation of Hume. Their comments consist not only of an exploration of Hume's theories and doctrines, but also of expositions and supporting arguments for their own particular philosophical point of view. Their positions gained prominence at the expense of Hume's, and his philosophy became secondary.[2] The polemical interest displayed by these philosophers may partially account for the way in which they viewed Hume; but it is surprising that Leslie Stephen, whose main interests were historical, accepted the account according to which Hume's teaching was regarded as essentially sceptical. In a summary of what he takes to be Hume's central doctrines, Leslie Stephen says:

> Hume starts from the positions occupied by Locke and Berkeley. He regards innate ideas as exploded; he accepts Berkeley's view of abstraction (as he understands it) and of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities; he applies and carries out more systematically the arguments by which Berkeley had assailed the hypothetical substratum of material qualities. But with Hume the three substances [i.e., mind, matter and God] disappear together. The soul is dissolved by the analysis which has been fatal to its antithesis. . . . We are conscious only of an unceasing stream of more or less vivid feelings, generally cohering in certain groups. The belief that anything exists outside our mind, when

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[1] Ibid., II, 1. Cf. II, 2; 20-21; 54.

[2] Huxley wrote: "Here and there . . . it must be confessed that more is seen of my thread than of Hume's beads." [Huxley, op. cit., p. 45.]

> not actually perceived, is a 'fiction'. The belief in a continuous subject which perceives the feeling is another fiction. The only foundation of the belief that former coherences will again cohere is custom. . . . Association is in the mental what gravitation is in the natural world. The name signifies the inexplicable tendency of previously connected ideas and impressions to connect themselves again. We can only explain mental processes of any kind by resolving them into such cases of association. Thus reality is to be found only in the ever-varying stream of feelings, bound together by custom, regarded by a 'fiction' or set of fictions as implying some permanent set of external or internal relations, and becoming beliefs only as they acquire liveliness. Chance, instead of order, must, it would seem, be the ultimate objective fact, as custom, instead of reason, is the ultimate subjective fact. We have reached, it is plain, the fullest expression of scepticism, and are not surprised when Hume admits that his doubts disappear when he leaves his study. The old bonds which held things together have been completely dissolved. Hume can see no way to replace them, and Hume, therefore, is a systematic sceptic.[1]

In emphasizing the scepticism of the Treatise, Leslie Stephen has overlooked Hume's doctrine of natural belief. Books II and III of the Treatise of Human Nature, in which Hume expounds his theory of passions and his positive moral theory, have been set aside as irrelevant or unimportant.

The histories of philosophy written by Windelband and Erdmann indicate a somewhat wider breadth of interpretation of Hume's philosophy. Both emphasize that Hume cannot be regarded strictly as a sceptic. Erdmann states that Hume's aim was "to limit the understanding to the sphere where it could accomplish something."[2] Windelband claims that Hume's

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[1]Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1876), I, 43-45.

[2]Johann Eduard Erdmann, History of Philosophy, trans. W. S. Hough (3rd ed., London: Swann & Sonnenshein & Co., 1892), II, 130.

position is that of the absolutely honest and consistent empiricist. There is a characteristic supplement for Hume's theory of knowledge in his doctrine of natural belief.[1] In his thought the doctrine of natural belief is completely adequate for practical life. Both Erdmann and Windelband assert that Hume always emphasized practical as well as theoretical philosophy. They contend that Hume's theory of knowledge is directly derived from the empirical doctrines formulated by Locke and developed by Berkeley. In the moral field, Hume is a member of the Moral Sense School of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Adam Smith. In the problems of epistemology Hume is presented as carrying to a logical conclusion the doctrines of empiricism; but in moral theory he is not influenced to the same extent by Locke and Berkeley.

In giving a few new insights Windelband and Erdmann have advanced beyond the traditional attitude towards Hume. But, fundamentally, the interpretation has changed very little. We are told that we must not regard Hume as a sceptic; yet in the accounts given by these writers it is difficult to see exactly why he should not be regarded as one. The reported conclusions at which he arrived are certainly sceptical enough. As for Hume's doctrine of natural belief (which is depicted by Erdmann and Windelband as more or less an afterthought), it may be argued that Locke and Berkeley also supplemented their systems, but they are nevertheless regarded

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[1]Wilhelm Windelband, History of Philosophy, trans. J. H. Tufts (New York: Macmillan, 1893), p. 476.

as sceptical writers. The general position at which we arrive is still simply a slightly modified restatement of the evaluation of Reid and Beattie.

The logical implications of this traditional interpretation forces us to accept unfavorable conclusions as to the character, quality, and intent of Hume and his work. Are these conclusions true? The answer to this question can only be ascertained by examining the biographical and philosophical materials available to us. We must try to determine if Hume is simply a more consistent advocate of the empirical tradition of Locke and Berkeley. We must examine the evidence given in support of the contention that there is a fundamental paradox or hypocrisy in Hume's life and works. It is necessary to investigate these problems in order to come to a true understanding of the man and his writings.

Re-interpretation of Hume's Teaching

Within the past fifty years technical investigations concerning the life and thought of David Hume have been continually on the increase. Before the turn of the century there seemed to be no question about the conclusions of Hume's philosophical investigations being completely negative. He was regarded as having taken the empirical positions of Locke and Berkeley and carried them ruthlessly to their logical conclusions. The tide has now changed, and new interpretations of Hume's work have been advanced. There has been a strong reaction against the traditional interpretation. In the

advanced studies carried out by such scholars as E. B. McGilvary, Norman Kemp Smith, Edna A. Shearer, F. C. Sharp, C. W. Hendel, Hugh Miller, Mary Shaw Kuypers, R. E. Hobart, John Laird, B. M. Laing, P. Stanley, Contance Maund, H. H. Price, E. C. Mossner, J. A. Passmore, and others,[1] there has been a general trend towards the view that Hume should be studied for guidance rather than to be refuted. Hume has been slowly emerging as a positive force in the modern world; he is seen as a dynamic and influential factor in the philosophical scene. Former accounts and commentaries on his life and philosophy are shown to have been subjective and biased. Quite clearly we can see the truth in the claim that there is a need for re-interpretation of Hume in the light of more intensive and objective research into his life and writings.

Hume is regarded today as a great philosopher. Men have been able to overcome the fear that his questionings will corrupt morals and religion. His special questions concerning the value of the principle of cause and effect have come to be appreciated as the discovery of genius. Other aspects of his system have also been accepted and applied to modern philosophical endeavor. Nevertheless, the general conception of Hume is still an eighteenth and nineteenth century one, a view which regards his chief contribution to be a challenging sceptical attitude. This was Kant's discovery,

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[1]The titles of the articles and books published by these authors may be found in the Bibliography of this thesis.

and it appears that he saw in Hume simply critical genius.[1] It is largely due to Kant's influence that the present day appreciation of Hume is merely of a man who manifested an admirable spirit of honest inquiry. Such a spirit was typical of the eighteenth century mind. A man was held in high esteem who studied, analyzed and reasoned out his conclusions. The critical spirit was always cool, unperturbed, and disinterested; self-delusion had to be painstakingly avoided. It was true of the eighteenth century man of letters that his hope for progress gave him persistence in the questioning of what we really mean by the convictions we live by and call the truth. These characteristics Hume shared with his contemporaries.

It cannot be denied that scepticism is to be found in the philosophical works of Hume; but the question must be asked, "What kind of scepticism does one encounter here?" The traditional interpretation of Hume has consistently pictured him as advocating a completely negative and destructive scepticism with regard to the possibility of man's knowledge of the self, the existence of an external world, and the relation of cause and effect. Emphasis has been placed primarily on Book I of the Treatise to such an extent that Books II and III are largely neglected; consequently, the ordinary reader of Hume comes away with the negative aspect of his thought and the feeling that he had nothing whatsoever of a constructive nature to say.

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[1]See supra, p. 15.

There is no doubt that Hume recognized himself as a critic; he was conscious of the predominately critical aspect of his philosophy. More will be said later concerning Hume's critical attitude, but what concerns us at the present moment is the query, "Does Hume claim to present a positive doctrine of any kind?" The answer to this question, for which evidence will be given in the chapters to follow, is in the affirmative. From statements made in his letters and from certain indications in his philosophical writings we see that he was not content to be regarded as merely a sceptical philosopher who only cleared ground for subsequent thinkers. He speaks of his literary ambition "to augment the Stock of Knowledge that must pass to future Ages."[1] He hoped to answer the questions raised by his sceptical doubts and devoted himself to this task.[2] In this aim Hume was carrying on the mission that Francis Bacon had set for himself--that of advancing knowledge in the fields of research opened by the scientific method. It was Hume's ambition to establish a body of knowledge that would develop fruitfully in the minds of other philosophers. He philosophized mainly to help people understand what they were doing in matters scientific, religious, ethical and philosophical. He wanted men to see the necessity for

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[1] Letters, I, 39.

[2] "If in order to answer the Doubts started, new Principles of Philosophy must be laid; are not these Doubts themselves very useful? Are they not preferable to blind, & ignorant Assent? I hope I can answer my own Doubts: But if I coud not, is it to be wonder'd at? To give myself Airs, & speak magnificently, might I not observe, that Columbus did not conquer Empires & plant Colonies?" [Letters, I, 156.]

constructing their own system of knowledge grounded in human experience.

It is a misconception, established by bigoted contemporaries of Hume, to regard his work as wholly sceptical; he attempted to answer the doubts he had raised. The deep-seated desire to enter the literary world and to gain fame was in order that his work as a thinker might enlighten others; not destroy all human knowledge. Hume's ambition, rightly seen, was to contribute some positive truth to the body of permanent human knowledge. This is clearly seen in a statement made near the close of Book I of the Treatise:

> I am concern'd for the conditions of the learned world, which lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars. I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.[1]

Hume felt, and logically so, that his work as a thinker and man of letters would be fruitless without the recognition and response of his fellowmen. When this response failed to appear at the publication of the Treatise, he had pangs of self-distrust and began to ask himself why he had failed.[2] He regarded himself as a discoverer; and by some new means he hoped to establish truth in the fields of literary criticism and philosophy. Men would have to know the meaning of his philosophy and be enlightened by it if he were ever to realize his desire

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[1] T, 271. [2] Letters, I, 3.

to advance learning. Hume wanted to be assured of the soundness of his thinking by seeing that others had learned something positive from him after he had cleared away their prejudices and uncritical assumptions by critical and sceptical analysis. He had learned from Bacon and was in agreement with the idea that for a progress of learning there must be a collaboration of many minds in the construction of a common body of knowledge. In a letter Hume said: "The Arguments have been laid before the World, and by some philosophical Minds have been attended to. I am willing to be instructed by the public; tho' human Life is so short that I despair of ever seeing the Decision."[1] We may take this to be an expression of his longing to be instructed and criticized in order to help the progress toward truth.

It seemed to Hume that his ambition had been thwarted, and he began to question the value of his literary works and of his life as a whole.[2] He was left in doubt concerning his writing--had he made a real point in his philosophy? When the

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[1] Letters, I, 187.

[2] Letters, I, 4. In a letter to Francis Hutcheson, Hume wrote: "I assure you, that without running any of the heights of Scepticism, I am apt, in a cool hour to suspect, in general, that most of my Reasonings will be more useful by furnishing Hints & exciting People's curiosity than as containing any Principles that will augment the Stock of Knowledge that must pass to future Ages. I wish I cou'd discover more fully the particulars wherein I have fail'd. I admire so much the Candour I have observd in Mr Locke, Yourself, & a very few more, that I woud be extremely ambitious of imitating it, by frankly confessing my Errors: If I do not imitate it, it must proceed neither from my being free from Errors, nor from want of Inclination; but from my real unaffected Ignorance." [Letters, I, 39.]

Treatise was received with indifference and even open hostility, Hume began to lose hope of contributing to the knowledge of mankind; scepticism arose in his mind about the value of his system of thought. His persistence in re-writing the Treatise clearly shows that he believed in his answers to the questions which had been raised, but he wanted to know that he was discussing the right problems. He was anxious for an effectual discussion to arise out of his philosophy; this he felt would serve to assure him that he had the character of the true philosopher. When he found that no such discussion came, he suffered the doubts of one who questions if his life has contributed anything. A profound discontent with himself appears in his personal letters to friends. Yet he did not give up his chosen career. In the revisions and deletions of sections from the Treatise found in Hume's Enquiries and Essays, we see him at work correcting and criticizing his original attempts to contribute a positive theory.

Recent research into Hume's philosophy has tended to substantiate his claim to have made a positive contribution. Commentators have questioned the narrow traditional view of his intentions which widely prevailed previous to Norman Kemp Smith's work on Hume.[1] It has been cogently argued from

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[1]Kemp Smith first suggested the possibility of a new interpretation of Hume's teaching in two articles entitled "The Naturalism of Hume" published in Mind, XIV (1905), 143-173; 335-347. The general arguments of these articles were later expanded and appear in The Philosophy of David Hume, A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1941; Reprinted 1949).

evidence in Hume's works themselves that his scepticism is a "mitigated" or methodological type advanced for the purpose of clearing ground in preparation for a new system of thought--the science of human nature. In answer to the question raised concerning the logical necessity for the causation of the universe, Hume's sceptical analysis led him to the suggestion of a form of naturalism as a possible alternative explanation for the existence of the world.[1] But this was, at least, a positive suggestion; whether or not it can be consistently held with the sceptical conclusions of his thought is another matter.

For many years after Hume made his discovery about causal reasoning, his achievement was valued, primarily, as an effective criticism of an old metaphysical type of reasoning. In the early part of the present century the situation began to change and the idealism inspired by Hegel and the Romantic Movement slowly receded in popularity as new doctrines of a positive nature entered on the philosophical scene. Humanism, experimentalism, pragmatism and realism came into prominence; the type of thinking broadly called naturalism made its claims to recognition as an explanation of the nature of things. While these points of view were developing in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth, there was an increasing interest in the writing of

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[1] C. W. Hendel agrees with Kemp Smith on the matter of Hume's acceptance of naturalism as a thoroughly possible view for the cause of nature. [C. W. Hendel, Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927), pp. 59-63.]

David Hume. Translations of his works were printed in various languages. Some of the men who found themselves drawn to the naturalistic tendency referred to Hume as their mighty forebear. It was believed that Hume had something positive to say and that we should read him with the purpose of getting new insight from his pages.

One commentator, Constance Maund, asserts that she "disagrees strongly with the view of [Hume's] early critics, which is still widely current, that Hume has nothing of importance to contribute to philosophy and that his own claim to fame as a philosopher lies in the fact that he developed the false premisses of his predecessors to their logical conclusions."[1] Maund believes that Hume's positive contribution was of prime importance for "he was the first to raise some of the problems about which philosophers are still puzzling today."[2] A number of students of Hume's philosophy have now agreed with this view.[3] Rudolf Metz, John Laird, André-Louis Leroy, J. A. Passmore, and other commentators, manifesting a sympathy for Hume's works, have interpreted Hume as attempting to erect a science of human nature which would serve as a basis for all other studies. It is interesting to note the development of a new appreciation and reorientation

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[1]Constance Maund, Hume's Theory of Knowledge, A Critical Examination (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1937), p. v.

[2]Ibid., p. vi.

[3]H. H. Price indicates his opposition to the traditional attitude which attempts only to refute Hume and to pounce on his every error and inconsistency. [H. H. Price, Hume's Theory of the External World (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 3.]

of Hume's thought in the articles and books of recent Hume scholars. It would be impossible within the compass of this paper to present all the basic contentions of these various authors. Therefore, attention will be centered upon what we believe is the most comprehensive and representative presentation of this modern interpretation of David Hume.

The work of Norman Kemp Smith may rightly be considered the major contribution to a re-interpretation of Hume.[1] The Philosophy of David Hume enlarges and transcends all previous research and calls for an almost complete re-orientation of our view of Hume's philosophy. The new and revolutionary nature of the book is expressed in three principal theories: First, Kemp Smith contends it is impossible to evaluate the meaning and outcome of Hume's philosophy until its naturalistic foundations are taken into account. Second, a theory is advanced concerning hitherto unrecognized influences on the development of Hume's philosophy. Finally, Kemp Smith suggests a new theory concerning the way in which the Treatise, Hume's major work, was composed.

The theory dealing with the naturalistic basis of Hume's philosophy first appeared in Kemp Smith's articles "The Naturalism of Hume" in Mind. Dissatisfied with the

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[1] A present day commentator on Hume's philosophy, J. A. Passmore, states that his method for interpretation was suggested by Kemp Smith's articles in Mind, by The Philosophy Of David Hume and by the discussions in Kemp Smith's edition of Hume's Dialogues. [J. A. Passmore, Hume's Intentions (Cambridge: University Press, 1952), p. vii.]

traditional interpretation that Hume's system is characterized by complete scepticism, Kemp Smith tries to determine the central theme of Hume's philosophy without attempting to trace the influences on him. The determining factor in Hume's philosophy, according to Kemp Smith, is "the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct."[1] When the positive aspects of Hume's work are ignored (as in T. H. Green's interpretation), one misses a great deal of the point, if not what is characteristic of the over-all system. The basis of Hume's philosophy is a new and revolutionary concept of knowledge not found in the philosophy of his predecessors. Reason is purely practical in its application and ultimately rests on theoretically unjustifiable tendencies or instincts of human nature.

Kemp Smith asserts:

> . . . the chief aim of Hume's philosophy is to prove that, save as regards those relations upon which the mathematical sciences are based, belief never rests on reason or insight, and that, on the contrary, what we may call synthetic reason is itself merely generalised belief. The assumption of the existence of body is a "natural belief" due to the ultimate instincts or propensities that constitute our human reason. It cannot be justified by reason, but this unaccountability it shares in common with our moral and aesthetic judgements and with all those theoretical beliefs which concern matters of fact.[2]

This doctrine of belief is one of the most essential and perhaps most characteristic doctrines in Hume's philosophy.

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[1]Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume," p. 150.

[2]Ibid., p. 151.

Hume contends that we cannot by means of reason explain any of the ultimate characteristics of our experience--the origin of sensation, the nature of causal connection, apprehension of reality, appreciation of beauty, judgment of an action as good or bad. The alternative is not scepticism, but the practical test of human validity. Certain beliefs or judgments can be shown to be "natural," "inevitable," "indispensable," and are thus removed beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts.[1] The necessity of the relation of cause and effect, the existence of the external world, the existence of the self--these are recognized as natural beliefs, determined for us by nature. They cannot be justified by reason.

Kemp Smith refutes Green's opinion that Hume's principles are all borrowed from Locke and Berkeley and that Hume's philosophy may be adequately regarded as simply the consistent and thorough development of their fundamental principles. "There is," Kemp Smith claims, "much positive teaching in the Treatise which is not to be found anywhere in the writings of [Hume's] predecessors; and his philosophy is throughout inspired by a new conception of knowledge. . . ."[2] Hume is not a sceptic as to the powers of reason but regards its sole function as being practical.

> The function of knowledge is not to supply a metaphysics, but only to afford us guidance in practical life. If we are content to regard our beliefs as the outcome of the ultimate propensities that constitute our human nature, they can be shown in their perfect fitness to the calls

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[1]See T, 187. [2]Kemp Smith, "Naturalism of Hume," p. 155.

> which things make upon us, to be as wonderfully adapted as any of the animal instincts; but if, on the other hand, we wrongly insist on interpreting them as the conclusions of supposed inferences, they will be found to rest on a mass of contradictions and of theoretically unjustifiable assumptions.[1]

Kemp Smith repeats this interpretation of Hume in The Philosophy of David Hume:

> . . . what is central in [Hume's] teaching is not Locke's or Berkeley's 'ideal' theory and the negative consequences, important as these are for Hume, which follow from it, but the doctrine that the determining influence in human, as in other forms of animal life, is feeling, not reason or understanding, i.e. not evidence whether a priori or empirical, and therefore also not ideas--at least not 'ideas' as hitherto understood. 'Passion' is Hume's most general title for the instincts, propensities, feelings, emotions and sentiments, as well as for the passions ordinarily so called; and belief, he teaches, is a passion. Accordingly the maxim which is central in his ethics--'Reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions'--is no less central in his theory of knowledge, being there the maxim: 'Reason is and ought to be subordinate to our natural beliefs.'[2]

In Hume's philosophy two distinct meanings are ascribed to "reason." "All reasonings may be divided into two kinds, namely, demonstrative reasoning, or that concerning relations of ideas, and moral reasoning, or that concerning matter of fact and existence."[3] In discursive analytic reasoning, the truth of ideas is guaranteed by the law of non-contradiction; such truth is found in the sciences of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic.[4] The logical necessity, which consists in the impossibility of conceiving the opposite, is the sole form of rational necessity known to us and is completely absent from

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[1] Ibid. [2] Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, p. 11.

[3] E, 35. [4] E. 25.

all our knowledge of matters of fact.[1] Kemp Smith interprets Hume's concept of synthetic reason as follows:

> When we seek by means of inferences to extend our knowledge of real existence, we make use of certain non-rational synthetic principles which can only be explained as blind instinctive propensities of the human soul. And as this second, synthetic, form of reasoning embraces all knowledge outside mathematics (for even the present testimony of sense and the records of memory involve synthetic principles), it is much the more important; and Hume constantly equates it with reason in general.[2]
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> . . . [Hume] seeks to show that owing to the constitution of our experience, [rational necessity] cannot be attained in any department of our knowledge of matters of fact. Natural belief takes the place of rational insight.[3]

In a brief summary of Hume's main argument in the Treatise and the Enquiry Kemp Smith endeavors to state the grounds of Hume's naturalistic view of reason and to show how his philosophy of knowledge culminates in a new theory of belief. It is pointed out here that there is a close connection between Hume's theory of knowledge and his ethical teaching.[4] An associational explanation is advanced to account for certain indispensable beliefs which are incapable of theoretical justification (e.g., permanence and identity in things; belief in the self as an abiding existence). There is in man a "feeling" of identity. Hume assigns a determining influence to this feeling; it has a practical function in our lives, but we cannot base a metaphysic of the soul on it. Feeling plays a role in the explanation of the belief in the necessity of causal connection and in the assumption that the future will resemble the past; there is not sufficient evidence existing in experience for such inferences. Blind but

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[1]Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume," p. 156-157.
[2]Ibid., p. 157. [3]Ibid., p. 158. [4]Ibid., p. 159.

powerful instinct irresistibly inclines the mind to these beliefs. They are the outcome of some unreasoning propensity, and that propensity is custom or habit.[1] Hume does not pretend to give the ultimate reason for such a propensity, but merely indicates it as an observable principle of human nature.[2]

Kemp Smith declares:

> This new theory of belief is the indispensable complement of Hume's new view of the function of knowledge, and was all-important in determining his philosophical attitude. By his predecessors belief had been regarded as purely intellectual, dependent on insight, and therefore at the mercy of the philosophical sceptic; whereas, if Hume's teaching is true, it does not result from knowledge but precedes it, and as it is not caused by knowledge, so also is not destroyed by doubt.[3]

Thus, sceptical arguments cannot overthrow our natural belief without totally destroying our human nature.

Hume opposes the spiritualism and consequent deism of Descartes and his English successors.[4] But in doing so he does not repudiate entirely the functions of reason. Kemp Smith indicates that Hume has a positive view of the relation of reason to feeling and instinct:

> . . . though reason cannot take the place of natural belief, still less overthrow it, its generalising powers are yet necessary for its interpretation and control. Only through the use of our natural beliefs as universal synthetic principles can we discover their limited range and their merely practical worth.[5]

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[1] E, 43.

[2] Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume," pp. 160-165.

[3] Ibid., p. 165.

[4] T, 179, 267.

[5] Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume," p. 169.

This positive view of the use of reason is in agreement with Hume's conclusions in his ethical philosophy.

In the second article of the series on Hume's Naturalism, Kemp Smith attempts to show how Hume finds in the facts of the moral life convincing confirmation of his naturalistic view of reason, and so is enabled to develop his ethical theory in complete harmony with his general philosophy. Hume's moral theory is described as the natural and logical extension of the principles found in this theory of knowledge. The central point is the dependence of reason on feeling and instinct. Reason in morals is dependent on the natural passions--the foundation of human nature. Kemp Smith points out that Hume has a positive attitude towards the function of reason in the ethical sphere: "Through the instinctive activities of reason nature adapts the other instincts of man to the complex requirements of social existence."[1] Reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral action.[2] Feeling determines the ends; reason decides when and how these can best be attained. Without displacing the instincts, reason enables them to fulfil their human function.

It is pointed out by Kemp Smith that Hume's theory of reason and instinct runs throughout his whole philosophy and gives unity to his system. Kemp Smith sums up his interpretation of Hume's naturalism as follows:

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[1] Ibid., p. 345. [See E, 201-202.]

[2] T, 590; E, 172-173.

> Only when we have recognized the important functions which Hume ascribes to feeling and instinct, and the highly complex emotions and propensities which he is willing to regard as ultimate and unanalysable, are we in a position to do justice to his new, and very original, conception of the nature and conditions of experience. Hume may, indeed, be regarded, even more truly than Kant, as the father of all those subsequent philosophies that are based on an opposition between thought and feeling, truth and validity, actuality and worth. Though his real position is positivism or naturalism, it is not of that familiar type which seeks to limit knowledge to material phenomena, but rather is akin to the broader, more humanistic, philosophy which was developed by Comte in his later days, and which rests the hopes of the future on those sciences which more immediately concern our human nature. For Hume's disbelief in speculative physics and in metaphysics is more than counterbalanced by a belief in the possibility of a philosophical science of human nature, and of the special sciences of ethics, aesthetics, politics and political economy. These, he believes, are sciences which have a sure foundation in human experience.[1]

In The Philosophy of David Hume Kemp Smith again emphasizes the fact that most critics have represented Hume's philosophy as the extension of Locke's theory of ideas to its logical conclusion--scepticism. They failed to emphasize that both Locke and Berkeley had supplemented the theory of ideas. Supplements were necessary to account for experience not assimilated to their theory. Kemp Smith contends that Hume had a supplement also [the doctrine of natural belief] and that the point of much of his sceptical writing is to illustrate its necessity.[2] No trace of this characteristic supplement is found in the philosophies of Locke or Berkeley who are usually regarded as the only significant influences on Hume. Kemp Smith turns to Francis Hutcheson as a

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[1]Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume," pp. 346-347.

[2]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 8-12.

logical source for previous traces of the doctrines which are considered to be central in Hume's philosophy.[1] An evaluation of Hutcheson's influence is presented as one of the keys to the understanding of Hume's philosophy. Hutcheson's effect, according to Kemp Smith, is dominant not only in Hume's positive contributions to moral philosophy but also in his theory of knowledge.[2]

As a youth Hume took an interest in literature as well as philosophy and was widely read in various languages. He seriously considered books bearing on human nature and studied works on religion, politics, history, and other subjects connected with man.[3] In this endeavor he shared the common opinions of the eighteenth century, for a man of letters dealt with a great variety of topics. Kemp Smith suggests that the most illuminating part of Hume's philosophy is found in his discussion of "moral subjects."[4] In moral theory Hume expresses most effectively the true intentions of his writing. Hume claimed this himself when he regarded The Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals as his chief work.[5]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 12-20; 45-51. This thesis was expressed by Kemp Smith in an article entitled "David Hume, 1739-1939" which appeared in Hume and Present Day Problems, Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XVIII (London: Harrison and Sons, Ltd., 1939), pp. xvi-xx.

[2] Further discussion of Hutcheson's influence on Hume appears in Chapter IV of this thesis. [See infra, pp. 166-170.]

[3] Letters, I, 1-2.

[4] Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 12-13; 154f; 159.

[5] Letters, I. 4.

His increasing interest in matters of history, politics, morality and religion is significant when we recall the topics which he neglected to reconsider in his subsequent studies (i.e., the problems of space, time and mathematics). Hume no doubt recognized that his powers could be effectual in the sciences of human nature, whereas he labored under personal limitations in the sphere of mathematical and physical science.

In analyzing the way in which the Treatise was composed, Kemp Smith contends that it was in connection with ethical questions, and under Hutcheson's influence, that Hume first came to formulate the more strictly logical problems dealt with in Book I.[1] In the book on the understanding the thesis is formulated that in all judgments of matters of fact and existence belief takes the place of knowledge and as being belief, not knowledge, rests exclusively on feeling, as predetermined by the constitution of our common human nature. Kemp Smith's interpretation of the composition of the Treatise is based on two observations: First, Hume's doctrine of sympathy is as central in Books II and III as is his doctrine of belief in Book I, and the doctrine of belief is suggested by and modelled upon the doctrine of sympathy. Second, Hume's formulation of the laws of association in Book III shows that the teaching of Books II and III antedate the teaching of Book I. The bulk of the last two books is

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[1]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 159-160; 205-229. See also Kemp Smith, "David Hume, 1739-1939," pp. xxi-xxxi.

prior, both in the first thinking out of their teaching, and in the date of their original composition, to the use made of association in the first book. Kemp Smith suggests that a recognition of these contentions sheds new light on the philosophy of David Hume and aids in an interpretation and understanding of some basic difficulties encountered in an analysis of the Treatise.

Hume's Religious Attitude

Largely due to the impetus of Kemp Smith's studies, scholars have been considering the possibility of an underlying unity in Hume's writing. In perusing the work of the commentators interested in finding this unity of intention in his philosophy, it may be noted that very little attention is given to the discussion of the religious ideas in his system. It is our aim in this thesis to gain an understanding of Hume's attitude towards religion. After metaphysics and epistemology, there is perhaps no sphere in which the influence of David Hume's writing has been more greatly manifested than in religion and theology. His ideas in this realm have usually been regarded as purely negative and fatal not only to the supernatural revelation of Christianity but also to the rationalistic religion of Deism.

It is customary to think of Hume as being extremely indifferent to religion, if not violently opposed to it. Many commentators have regarded him as actually denying any meaning to religious statements. Kant's discovery of Hume through the interpretation and quotations of James Beattie appears to

have established a tradition which greatly neglects any attempt to understand the man or even to come to a full knowledge of his philosophical and literary intentions.

Writing near the close of the nineteenth century, Henry Calderwood gave the following description of the typical attitude towards Hume:

> Notwithstanding Hume's vast ability and many services, his name has hitherto awakened the dislike of the majority of his fellow-countrymen, because of his openly avowed scepticism concerning views reverently cherished by Christian men.
>
> The keen antagonism of the religious men of the time induced the country to regard Hume as an "Infidel," a "Philistine," and an "Arch Sceptic," a good man who had gone astray.[1]

Even today most individuals read Hume exclusively as the sceptic and atheist. His work is seen only in contrast to an idealism which was called into being as an answer to that scepticism logically following from the empirical starting point accepted by Locke and Berkeley. Some critics have recognized a small trace of constructive thought in Hume's moral theory which ties him in historical continuity with the moral sense school or with utilitarian ethics. But even these interpretations are presented in such a manner as to leave the impression that his contributions were insignificant.

To accept Hume's philosophy in the light of these interpretations places it in a position where it is powerless to give any new inspiration. We are forced to regard his system as one having influenced only the thought of the

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[1]Henry Calderwood, David Hume (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1898), p. 5.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It may have been due to fear of such misrepresentations of his concepts that Hume left for posterity his autobiography, "My Own Life." In this brief memoir he endeavors to convey the story of his purposes and career and pictures himself as having a passionate devotion to truth.[1] Hume seemingly felt that if his autobiography presented new insights into his life, then it was possible that a renewed interest in his work would bring about the recognition of the true meaning of his writings.

There is sufficient evidence to substantiate the view that Hume had an abiding religious interest, one that arose in his youth and continued throughout his life-time. He always professed, however inconsistently, some kind of belief in a Supreme Being and considered philosophical theism a defensible position which he claimed as his own. Information relative to Hume's early reasoning indicates that his career as a philosophical thinker was begun by questioning the religious beliefs of his day. Questions concerning religion had arisen in his mind before he was twenty; he had not yet begun to write the Treatise. When tracing the progress of Hume's thought, it should be kept in mind that his scepticism arose, in part at least, from earnestly wrestling with the arguments to confirm in his own mind the common opinion of the existence of a personal God.[2] It becomes plausable to suppose that his discovery of the new view of causation and his positive contributions in the moral sphere came as a

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[1] Letters, I, 1-7. [2] Letters, I, 154.

result of dealing with the realities of religious belief. We intend to show in this paper that it was through a study of religious problems that Hume came to embark on a philosophical career. From these questionings he developed a sceptical attitude of mind, but he never became as irredeemably anti-religious as most books picture him.

It appears from some of Hume's letters that he was for a long time in perplexity over the attitude he should take towards religion. Religious conviction was an aspect of human nature which he had undertaken to examine by the new experimental method of analysis. But a doubt arose in his mind as to whether he had really provided a new medium of truth which could answer all questions, especially the most vital of questions--those of religious import. The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, for the publication of which Hume took such great pains, may be interpreted as expressing something of the inner conflict of his mind. There appears to have been an opposition within his own thinking between belief and doubt, and the dialogue style of writing provided him with an excellent means of putting before men's minds the questions of religion which had been troubling him for several years.

There are indications of repeated attempts on Hume's part to uphold the common religious opinion--belief in a living God. He desired a definite answer, one way or the other. Having a restless mind, and imagining all sorts of possibilities Hume could not confirm himself in the Christian

faith. Intellectual restlessness made it impossible for him to accept anything as certain, except the truth man has in such realms as mathematics and logic. He evidently saw some validity for Christian beliefs and noted that there was a natural inclination to believe in God; otherwise he would have entirely given up these ideas and focussed his attention on other problems. Recognizing a reasonableness and value in some aspects of religion, Hume was tossed between his doubts and his inclinations to assent. These conflicting attitudes he recorded in his notebooks throughout a number of years.[1]

Despairing of reaching certainty in religious matters, Hume concerned himself with a subject he believed to be fruitful for exploration--the science of human nature. He considered this discovery so important that he began to put his ideas in writing and later published them in the Treatise. He believed he had discovered a method which would make possible a profitable examination of human nature. In the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, published eight years after the Treatise, Hume made bold to discuss some of the questions about religion that had been bothering his mind. In this book we find the two essays entitled "Of Miracles" and "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State." The essay "Of the Natural History of Religion" indicates that Hume's interest continued in that aspect of human experience which has to do with religion. In the Dialogues we have what

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[1]Letters, I, 154.

may rightly be considered his mature thought on the validity of the traditional answers to religious questions; here he states the truth he believes he has found in the religious realm.

In the following chapters we shall endeavor, chiefly by biographical and historical analyses, to arrive at some conclusions concerning Hume's true attitude towards religion. Our study will necessarily involve a survey of the religious milieu in which Hume was born and of which he continued to be a part as well as an attempt to appreciate the sort of man he really was. It is not easy to discover what his private religious views were. In his works there often occur passages which are curiously orthodox. But we cannot always be sure that these are truly indicative of his own personal beliefs. Evidence will be presented to show that the expression of Hume's religious opinions provides some interesting and illuminating insights into the man and his work. One of the principal aims of this thesis is to advance the suggestion that Hume's religious interests and opinions must be considered if we are to attain proper understanding of the unity which modern Hume scholars are seeking in his philosophy. If Hume was as interested in religion as the evidence seems to indicate, then there is good reason for our examining the influence of this religious attitude on the formulation of his positive doctrines.

In order to study objectively Hume's philosophy we must consider his abiding concern with religion as well as his

clearly stated ambition of contributing some positive truth to the body of human knowledge. We intend to take Kemp Smith's suggestions as to what Hume's constructive ideas were and to investigate how these ideas may be related to his abiding interest in religious questions. It is believed that when his positive doctrines are examined in the light of his religious opinions, we will see an integral connection of the two, each aiding in our understanding of the other. In this way David Hume will be viewed in a complete perspective wherein his guiding purpose becomes evident.

CHAPTER II

PREVAILING RELIGIOUS TENDENCIES IN THE AGE OF HUME

Introduction

For a proper understanding of Hume's own religious thought a knowledge of his Calvinistic environment is indeed an aid if not a necessity. Space will not permit a detailed analysis of the ecclesiastical events in the closing years of the seventeenth century which profoundly influenced the thoughts and actions of the clergy and laymen who were Hume's contemporaries, but a brief survey of the most important happenings in this turbulent period is needed. It would indeed be presumptuous to try to evaluate or to set forth in complete order all that transpired in the Church of Scotland in the years immediately preceding Hume's birth and during his lifetime. If in the following pages we can arrive at an appreciation of some of the ecclesiastical controversies and theological debates which surrounded Hume, our object in presenting this background will be accomplished.

Ecclesiastical Controversy

The end of the seventeenth century saw the beginning of an ecclesiastical revolution in Scotland and of a conflict between Presbyterians and Episcopalians which raged on into the following century. When William of Orange ascended the throne of England in 1688 a Presbyterian insurrection broke

out in Scotland and the Prelacy of the Stuarts was overthrown. The Claim of Right declared Episcopacy contrary to the inclination of the majority of people.[1] "In the beginning of 1689, 200 of the clergy had been expelled from their parishes by the Cameronian rabble; and, in the course of this year, their refusal to read the proclamation in favour of William and Mary caused the ejection of nearly 200 more."[2] Even after being thus reduced, the Episcopal ministers remained far superior in number to the Presbyterian. This presented a grave problem to the Revolution Parliament which met in 1690. It was by its Acts relating to the Church that this session became important in Scottish History.[3] The results of the Settlement have been summarized by one church historian in the following words:

> The Revolution Settlement, as the arrangement was called which [came] to Scotland after the fighting was over, (1) abolished Episcopacy, (2) reinstated the surviving sixty in number, of the 400 ministers expelled from their livings in 1662, (3) restored the Act of 1592, which set up Presbyterianism, (4) ratified the Westminster Confession as the standard of the Church's belief, (5) abolished Patronage, the right of choice of a minister being given to the heritors, or landowners, but the congregation having the right to appeal to the Presbytery against a minister to whom they objected, (6) Episcopalian ministers, who were still in a large majority, were to be allowed to remain in their parishes provided they took an oath of allegiance, and accepted Presbyterian government, (7) the Covenants, however, were not renewed, and therefore

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[1]G. D. Henderson, The Kirk Through the Centuries (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Committee on Publications, 1940), p. 18.

[2]William Law Mathieson, Scotland and the Union (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1905), p. 13.

[3]P. Hume Brown, History of Scotland (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1911), III, 11.

the extreme Cameronians would not accept the Settlement, and join the new Church of Scotland.[1]

In the days following the Settlement there was much "rabbling," inquisition, and purging of the Episcopal curates until in 1694 Parliament imposed upon the Church a policy of toleration; the General Assembly was compelled to admit to a share in government all Episcopalian ministers who took the oath of allegiance, subscribed to the Confession of Faith, and conformed to Presbyterian rule.[2] It is significant that the Covenants were not renewed and the Act of 1662, which condemned them as unlawful, remained in force. Thus excommunication was "deprived of its civil penalties; and the oath of allegiance was adopted in lieu of all religious tests as the passport to political office."[3] The period after the Revolution was in a sense a time of decline of religious and ecclesiastical powers.

King William advocated a liberal policy and contended for a tolerant treatment of his Episcopal adherent in Scotland. His scheme failed chiefly because the Episcopal clergy did not accommodate themselves to the subordinate position which the Act of 1690 had assigned to them. Parliament in 1693 made the terms of conformity more difficult and in 1695 an Act

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[1]John D. Rose, Scotland's True Glory (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., n.d.), p. 113.

[2]Henry Grey Graham, The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (4th ed., London: Adam and Charles Black, Reprinted 1950), p. 271.

[3]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 14.

was passed which permitted the Episcopal ministers "who acknowledged William and Mary as lawful sovereigns, both de facto and de jure, to retain their livings, on condition that they took no part in the government of the Church."[1] Thus any attempt to unite discordant elements had to be given up. The Episcopal and Presbyterian factions were established then as separate systems.

William Law Mathieson regards the closing decade of the seventeenth century as manifesting the "existence of a moderate tradition intersecting rather than running parallel with the superficial ecclesiastical divisions." He states that,

> . . . if we look more closely into the spirit of the age, we shall find that the Revolution marks a definite and final readjustment in the relations of politics and religion, of Church and State. Ever since the reaction which had set in after the battle of Dunbar, religious interests had been declining in Scotland, and secular interests had been gaining ground; the ascendency of the religious question, no longer undisputed, had been prolonged beyond its natural duration by the misgovernment of the Stewarts: and now, after a hundred and thirty years of strife, the great majority of the nation were disposed to regard the questions as settled, and to devote themselves to more profitable pursuits.[2]

In opposition to the secular spirit that was beginning to gain strength, there was a zealous religious interest at work in Scotland. The meeting of the General Assembly in 1690 appointed two Commissions, one for the north and another for the south of the river Tay. "The object of both was the same--to restore church order and to extrude such ministers, Presbyterian or Episcopalian, as in life, doctrine, and

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[1] Ibid., p. 15. [2] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

political sentiments failed to give satisfaction to the Commissioners."[1] The work of the Commission in the north, where the covenanting spirit had never spread, was difficult and the Episcopal hierarchy remained in power. "There were few parishes where [the Commissioners] did not encounter more or less opposition to their reforming zeal."[2] In several places they were met by angry mobs and forced to flee for their lives. The Commission succeeded in deposing a considerable number of the Episcopal curates, many of whom went directly to England. The situation in the north continued to be unsettled for a number of years, and it is said that the Presbyterian minister of Lochcarron, in 1726, found it advisable to carry firearms to protect himself from his Episcopal parishioners.[3] "The process of the extrusion by the special Church Commission was most keenly resented by the fallen Church, and it was only by the decisive interference of the Government that the inquisition was gradually stayed."[4]

To the south of the Tay the Commissioners had the sympathy of the main body of people.[5] When Presbyterianism was re-established there, so many of the Episcopal clergy were expelled that there were not enough Presbyterian ministers to

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 12.

[2]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[3]Hew Scott, Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1917), VII, 160.

[4]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 13.

[5]Ibid., p. 12.

take their places. Many districts had been without ministers for so long that manses became uninhabitable and the churches fell in ruins.[1] The Presbyterians began to strengthen their hold on this section of the country and no doubt, in many cases, their methods were such as to cause resentment from the parishioners. These were the days of the pamphleteers when there was an incessant war of reproaches, recriminations, charges and countercharges; consequently, it is exceedingly difficult to determine the true character of the parties involved in the ecclesiastical conflicts of the time. It seems fairly certain, however, that the Presbyterian ministers, who came into power after the overthrow of Prelacy, lacked the characteristics of moderation and tolerance. The following estimate may be accepted as a fair representation of these clergymen:

> The old men, during their field-life and wanderings amongst bog mosses and moorland glens, had increased, not in learning but in fanaticism. The younger men--save the few who had studied in Holland--had had no opportunity for study, and usually felt that to know the Lord's Word was worth all the pagan learning of the world. Though some were men of good sense and good scholarship, and several of good birth, the great majority were rude in mind and manners, grimly religious and bigoted in spirit. . . A persecution such as the Presbyterian had of late years undergone, which was not fiery, but merely vexatious and irritating, does not develop the higher qualities or polish the soul to finer graces. It had neither the physical trial which makes heroes, nor the spiritual endurance which forms saints. To be too long in opposition engenders . . . a habit of magnifying little points of difference into questions of vital importance. When such men, with the self-conscious glow of martyrdom, emerge from obscurity to publicity, and exchange weary contumely and defeat for truculent victory, they are unable to wield their power with moderation, for they mistake fanaticism for earnestness,

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[1]Graham, Social Life, p. 274.

> and in pious hostility to opponents 'confound their antipathies with their duties.'
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> Such was the prevailing temper of the ministers at the beginning and during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, although they were earnest and honest men. . . .[1]

During the reign of William, the Church was held in check by civil authority. This situation was the cause of much bitter wrangling among the various groups in the churches and some contended that the General Assembly had lowered the flag of Christ to the authority of the king. But there were also dissatisfied groups outside the Established Church of the Revolution Settlement. The Episcopal hierarchy and its adherents, by openly pledging allegiance to King James, had sealed their own doom. Being looked upon as Jacobite suspects, the Episcopalians were forced to worship and consecrate new bishops in secret. Their grievances were kept before their fellow believers in England but to no avail until a new Episcopal dissenting church arose in Queen Anne's reign.

Another group under disabilities was the Society People, composed of Left Wing Covenanters and Cameronians. They objected to the Settlement because it had, in their opinion, ignored the Covenants and was founded on the inclinations of the people rather than on the authority of Scripture. Banding themselves together into a separate community called the Reformed Presbytery, the Cameronians and Covenanters refused to take an oath of allegiance, and continued to oppose the Established Church.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 276-277.

When the Westminster Confession of Faith was put on the statute book, unbelievers found themselves under religious persecutions. The strong feeling in Scotland against unbelief brought about a sad event in the year 1696 when Thomas Aikenhead, a student at Edinburgh University, on the basis of testimony from fellowstudents, was convicted of blasphemy and executed.[1] Mathieson declares that this tale of cruelty and injustice is paralled only in the blood-stained records of witch-persecution.[2] This intolerant attitude towards those who expressed thoughts contrary to accepted beliefs or questioned the validity of certain doctrines continued far into the eighteenth century and had a profound influence on the religious outlook of David Hume.

When Anne ascended the throne, the Scottish Parliament passed an Act securing Protestant religion and Presbyterian Church government in Scotland. This was considered necessary because of the danger of Jacobite intrigues which the Presbyterians believed would arise from anticipation of favors from the daughter of King James. The Church again asserted the intrinsic power of its courts to deliberate in all spiritual matters on their sole authority. The Act of Security "safeguarded for all time the National Church of Scotland as it had been established at the Revolution."[3] Although the Queen was inclined to give kindly consideration to the Episcopalians,

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 32.

[2]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 220-221.

[3]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 94.

there was very little she could do for them. The debates of the next few years indicate that the subject in which Anne and her advisers were most anxiously interested was the union of England and Scotland. The Presbyterians of Scotland were not unnaturally concerned lest their ecclesiastical polity should be displaced by an English establishment. "It is evident . . . that the Church, if not an opponent of the Union, was at least a most unfriendly critic. . . ."[1] After much difficulty and stormy negotiations the provisions of the union were finally agreed to by the Parliament of Scotland which adjourned to meet no more.

The Act of Security, accepted by the English as well as the Scottish legislators, ordained that the government of the Church by kirk sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies should continue unalterable and be the only government of the Church within the kingdom of Scotland. "By this solemn pledge for the immunity and perpetuity of their Church, its sager heads were gained for the Union; but no pledges could satisfy the majority of the country clergy, who all through the prolonged debate spared no endeavors to bring it to naught."[2] Most of the ministers were young and zealous and lacked experience. When we realize that the Union was very little in harmony with the clergy's ecclesiastical traditions and with popular feeling, it says much for the prudence, vigilence, and capacity of the Church's leaders,

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 180-188.

[2]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 94.

"that they adhered on the whole to the path of neutrality--unsympathetic and even menacing neutrality as it was--marked out for them by the Commission."[1]

Fearing an Episcopal attempt to gain power, the General Assembly of 1707 passed an Act against the use of Episcopalian forms of worship in Scotland. No toleration was permitted for forms of worship other than those which were established by law. Nevertheless, the Reverend James Greenshields, an Episcopal clergyman who came to Edinburgh in 1709, drew around him a congregation of his own persuasion. A number of Englishmen had settled in the city after the Union and now desired the liberty of attending the type of services to which they had been accustomed at home. Consequently, Greenshields boldly made use of the Anglican liturgy. A complaint, signed by two hundred persons, was presented to the Commission of the Church, and Greenshields was cited before the Presbytery. Although he denied the Church's jurisdiction, he was suspended "for officiating as a minister without warrant and for violating the uniformity of worship established by law."[2] The clergy of the Established Church regarded Greenshield's actions as "a wanton defiance at once of their jurisdiction and the law of the land--an opinion in which they were supported by the civil authorities of the town."[3] The Episcopal minister refused to comply with the

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 188.

[2]Ibid., pp. 195-198.

[3]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 116.

sentence of the Church court and continued holding services. The Presbytery received the endorsement of the magistrates; but Greenshields still continued obdurate, forcing the authorities to arrest and imprison him in the Tolbooth. After two unsuccessful petitions for redress to the Church courts, Greenshields appealed to the House of Lords who reversed the decision of the Court of Session on March 1, 1710.[1] The magistrates of Edinburgh, by whose instigation the minister had been imprisoned, were found liable in heavy fines.

The outcome of the Greenshields case naturally caused jubilation among the Episcopalians. But this was only the first blow to the Presbyterians; further humiliation was destined to follow. The Government, impelled by the prelatical party in Scotland and by general opinion, resolved to pass an Act by which the liberty of the Episcopalians to celebrate their religious rites should be formally declared. In 1712 the Jacobites introduced a bill into the Commons expressly designed for the protection of Episcopacy in Scotland. The Act of Toleration was passed through both houses of Parliament by a large majority. And although it was passed with ulterior motives on the part of both Jacobites and English Tories,[2] the Act was both reasonable and just. Episcopal worship in Scotland was declared lawful provided all ministers were ordained by Protestant bishops, held

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[1] Ibid., p. 116.

[2] Hume Brown points out that the Act was not really for toleration but was intended as an invasion of the Church's jurisdiction. [Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 117.]

their assemblies openly, and took the oaths of allegiance and abjuration. The Episcopal priest who administered baptism, or performed the ceremony of marriage was no longer subjected to imprisonment or exile. One provision of the Act gave particular offence to the Presbyterians--civil penalties were not to follow upon ecclesiastical censures. Hitherto, religious offenders were turned over to the civil authority for punishment.[1] The Toleration Act put an end to the imposition of the old civil penalties and more tolerant views and enlightened conceptions of spiritual censures came into the Church of Scotland.

In the opinion of the Presbyterian clergy the Church's independence had been assailed by the Act of Toleration. When the Abjuration Oath was added on March 3, 1712 the Presbyterians were up in arms. "That a Presbyterian should be required to take an oath implying that the sovereign should be an Episcopalian, was naturally regarded as an outrage on his Church and his individual conscience."[2] The Oath of Abjuration caused serious trouble for some time. However, during the reign of George I, modifications were made to meet scrupulous consciences. "Ministers were still required to abjure the Pretender, but they were no longer made to affirm that the sovereign must be an Episcopalian."[3]

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[1]Greenshields had been imprisoned for an ecclesiastical offence and Thomas Aikenhead had been executed for his so-called religious infidelity.

[2]Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 188-189.

[3]Ibid., p. 189. There were still dissatisfied

There was yet another Act which was destined to have an even greater influence on the fortunes of the Church of Scotland. "Unfortunately, in 1712, contrary to the Treaty of Union and against a strong body of opinion in the Church, and really in the interest of Jacobite and Episcopal landowners, patronage was once more restored."[1] The practice of patronage had taken its rise from the custom of grants of land and money being given to the Church by lay proprietors in order that their vassals should be instructed in religious principles. Such benefactors retained the right of appointing ministers to their own benefices.[2] Lay patronage had been abolished in 1690 and the Church of Scotland was surprised when a Bill to restore patronage was introduced into the Commons. The statute came into force on May 1, 1712 and, as Mathieson states,

> . . . restored to all patrons who had not renounced it their right of presentation, and at the same time allowed them to retain the advantages which had been given to them in return for their loss. If the patron did not present within six months, his right was to pass to the presbytery; patrons who had not already taken the abjuration oath were to take it on signing a presentation; and those of them who were known or suspected to be Papists were debarred from presenting till they had renounced the Roman Catholic faith.[3]

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ministers in the south-western shires; the oath was considered as an impious invasion of the privileges of the Kirk. The authorities of the Church for the most part prudently ignored these intractable brethren.

[1] G. D. Henderson, The Kirk Through the Centuries, p.20.

[2] For a brief history of patronage in Scotland, see Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 204-209.

[3] Ibid., p. 210.

It appears that pure political expediency had prompted the legislators in their action on the question of patronage.[1] The welfare of the Church was not considered. Rather, the intention of the Government was to bring about a weakening of the Church's political influence. The lay patrons could be depended upon to see to it that no minister should be placed in a parish where he might work mischief against the Government. The measure which restored patronage resulted in much distress in the Church of Scotland, and many of its troubles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were connected with this question. But the disorder was to be traced not so much to patronage itself, as to the unreasonable and uncompromising manner in which it came to be administered by influential churchmen in succeeding years.

The Scottish Presbyterians were particularly gratified at the accession of George I who from the first was markedly disposed to show them favor. George fulfilled the requirements of the Act of Security in regard to the Church by taking the oath required by that Act without hesitation. When the General Assembly met in 1714, the King gave the fullest assurance of his determination to preserve inviolate the privileges of the Church. In return the Presbyterian divines drew up an address in which they declared their loyalty to the Government and their attachment to the King's person. The Church was beginning to recognize that Presbyterianism was bound up with the fate of the existing

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 118.

government; consequently, scarcely any ministers identified themselves with the Rebellion of 1715. From this period Presbyterians were looked upon as friends of the King in contradistinction to the Episcopalian party, who had proven themselves hostile.[1] Presbyterians were taken into confidence by the State and became loyally attached to the reigning powers. The landed proprietors were disposed in general to support the Established Church so that to some extent the clergy became reconciled to the measure by which patronage was re-imposed.

This was the state of ecclesiastical affairs when David Hume was born in the year 1711. We must now consider the theological opinions and religious practices which were then in prominence.

Religious Life[2]

The prevailing temper of doctrinal teaching in Scotland during the first quarter of the eighteenth century was

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[1]As Episcopalianism closely allied itself with the Jacobite party, intolerance again became prevalent. After the uprisings of 1715 and 1745 the Episcopalians found themselves under the ban of severe laws; hard times confronted those ministers who would not take the oath of allegiance. The harsh laws imposed on the Episcopalians allowed their opponents to pull down or burn their meeting houses. When the fear of Jacobitism and insurrection no longer frightened Parliament into intolerance, conditions were improved. Prince Charles died in 1788 and by 1792 the old penal statutes against the Scottish Episcopal ministers were repealed. See Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 313-316; 318-321; 369-370; Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

[2]For a complete account of the theological opinions and the religious and ecclesiastical life of the period, see Graham, Social Life, pp. 267-417.

a popularized version of Calvin's theology. Emphasis was placed on the darker features of that system and its main thoughts were distorted and exaggerated. To get a fair idea of the religion which was taught by the ministers and beloved of the people it is necessary to read no more than a few of the devotional and theological writings of the time. In these collected sermons, pamphlets, tracts, catechisms, and treatises on ecclesiastic controversies there are few variations in doctrine; the themes may alter, the style may vary but the dogmas remain the same--the fall of man, original sin, total depravity of human nature, redemption of the elect, the punishment of hell and the joy of heaven. Each author freely gave his opinion on these great themes; there was no hesitation whatsoever in explaining and deciding every question from the secret decisions of the Divine Mind before the beginning of time to the minute details of the eternal fate of man. But the Confession of Faith was always interpreted in its most rigid sense and diversity of opinion as to the meaning of its phrases was not allowed. The suggestion that there should be any natural virtue or knowledge in the human soul was regarded as heresy and subject to punishment by the Church courts. One historian has given the following picture of the condition of religion in Scotland:

> During the seventeenth century Scottish religion had fallen greatly under the influence of English Puritanism; and when to this we add the memory of the bitter strife of sixty years, and the economic misery of the moment, we can perhaps understand why at the Union, and for many years after, religion was seen in its grimmest form. Scottish religion depicted God as an implacable despot,

> swift to wrath. . . . It held by the doctrines of election and reprobation in all their severity. . . . Both in Church and in home the most relentless discipline was maintained. . . . The observance of the Sabbath was enforced with penalties. All other sacred times and seasons were deliberately ignored. . . .[1]

It has been said that the Scots of the early eighteenth century were a "priest-ridden" race, but the evidence seems to indicate that Scotland was really suffering from a "people-ridden" clergy.[2] There were frequent outbreaks of stubborn resistance to patronage; riots sometimes occurred when a minister was inducted whom the people had not chosen. Presbyteries were often too much afraid of the parishioners to ordain an unwelcome presentee. Consequently, the General Assembly was eventually forced to appoint what were called "riding committees" to install ministers who were unacceptable to the members of a church. This was an age characterized more by a tyranny of the laity than of the clergy; and as the kirk sessions were usually composed of six elders to one minister, there was nothing for the clergyman to do but carry out the decision of the laymen.

Illiterate men gained prominent positions in the Church because of their piety and austerity of life and doctrine.[3] Certain individuals were looked upon as peculiarly holy and specially gifted by divine grace; some were even

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[1] Andrew J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707-1929 (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Ltd., 1930), p. 28.

[2] Graham, Social Life, pp. 366-368.

[3] Ibid., p. 370.

regarded as possessing abilities to foretell the future. These pious leaders determined the spiritual temper of the individual churches. The minister who was rustic, familiar in style, rude and uncultivated in manners and education was highly regarded.[1] His sermons were evaluated by the parishioners and any teaching of morality was denounced as causing men to trust in their "filthy rags of self righteousness."[2] Preaching had to be purely doctrinal, emphasis being placed on the teaching that salvation was won by trusting to the atonement and in making a bargain with Christ. Such was the power and influence of the "saintly" elders in determining theological thought that it may be said that religious teaching in Scotland was vulgarized and levelled down until it came within the comprehension of the stupid and illiterate.

The life and work of a ministers in those days is fully portrayed in the Memoirs of Thomas Boston who died in 1732.[3] Clergymen were thoroughly upright individuals and eminently respected by their parishioners. But although they were pious and faithful, many ministers were narrow, uncouth and even superstitious during the first decade of the century. The intellectual level of the clergy improved rapidly, however, and by the middle of the century ministers were regarded as learned men and capable leaders.

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[1]John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1888), II, 354.

[2]Graham, Social Life, p. 369.

[3]See also Graham, Social Life, pp. 280-284.

The Scottish Sabbath was given almost superstitious veneration. Sunday in Scotland acquired "a sanctity which far exceeded that of the Sabbath of the Jews in their most Pharisaical days--equalling in austerity the Puritanism of New England, and surpassing the Puritanism of England. . . ."[1] The day was completely devoid of beauty, liberty and joy. Children were checked and thwarted and not allowed to exercise their minds and bodies by running, skipping, laughing, singing, whistling, or even walking--except to church and home again. Such activities were considered sinful on the Sabbath. Solemn preparations were made the day before and even Saturday night was sedate and grave. Attendance at services was compulsory and non-attenders were reported to the kirk session by elders who went out on morning and evening patrols to discover offenders. Assisted by the town councils, the "protectors" of the Sabbath were hard on Sabbath desecrators. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities joined in disciplinary measures; there was no escape from the dreaded inquisitional intrusion of the Church, supported by Acts of Parliament, resolutions of town councils and decisions of sheriffs. Fines were imposed for loitering in the streets or idly gazing out of windows, and certainly nothing was permitted that suggested the idea of labor. Even the minister had to walk circumspectly or find himself before the presbytery trying to explain an offence committed on the Sabbath.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 314.

[2] It is recorded that the minister of New Machar was

The Sabbath began with the six o'clock ringing of the kirk bell after which the household assembled for prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. No cooking was permitted until evening, so a cold breakfast was eaten before the family walked soberly to church. There was never to be any laughter and no one was allowed to talk except on spiritual themes. At the ringing of the second bell, usually between nine and ten o'clock, the people entered the kirk and were led in the singing of a metrical psalm. When the bell rang a third time the minister came into the building, ascended the pulpit stairs, and took charge of the service.

Before beginning his sermon, the preacher stood and prayed at great length extempore. In this way it was believed that the words uttered were given by God's Spirit. Should a minister forget or fumble over his words, this was regarded as a sign of God's displeasure with His servant. The clergy and the people manifested a boundless belief in prayer, which was entered into with pious fervor. Prayer was considered a divine gift and ministers who could continue with fluency and holy ardor were considered "great wrestlers."[1] They continued long and wept as their voices rose and fell in

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libelled before the Presbytery in 1735 for powdering his wig on the Sabbath. [A. Campbell Fraser, Thomas Reid (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1898), p. 31.]

[1]See Robert Wodrow, Analecta, or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences mostly relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1843), III, 303.

cadence with a peculiar whine. This mannerism was evidently retained from Covenanting times when it had been particularly effective in the open fields and on the hillsides. The rise and fall of the voice was now used to play on the emotions of the congregation. The pious were often moved to awe by grotesque and preposterous prayers which fanatical ministers vigorously offered as addresses to the Deity.[1]

Following prayer, the minister gave a lecture consisting of a passage from a chapter of Scripture read slowly with long, confused comments on each verse. Then, after praying again, he began his unwritten "ordinary" sermon based on a fixed text and timed by an hour-glass. One or two verses formed the subject of discourse for weeks or even months. A preacher was not highly esteemed unless he made his "ordinary" last for many weeks. The themes of the teaching invariably included the fourfold state of man and the essential points of the plan of salvation (i.e., what man was in the state of innocence; what he was after the fall; what he is under the gospel of grace; what shall be his eternal state). Each text was twisted so that these dogmas were found in every verse of Scripture.[2] Many of the preachers wept as they preached their sermons which, like their prayers, were delivered with the professional whine. At the close of the sermon, attention was diverted to the pillory--a raised platform or stool in front of the pulpit--and the minister

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[1] Ibid., III, 36.

[2] Graham, Social Life, p. 294.

admonished the offenders, warning them of their great punishment unless they repented. A prayer was offered again, not for the pardon of the guilty but for greater punishments to teach them to overcome evil desires. A benediction brought the three hour service to a close and the worshippers made their way home for another cold meal.

Before returning to the kirk for the afternoon service, the people were expected to question and instruct each other on the sermon of the morning and to peruse devout (but usually depressing) books. Conduct indoors as well as out was under restrain. School children were rigorously supervised and, with the servants, catechized on the doctrines of the Confession of Faith or examined on the minister's lectures and discourses. Answers were repeated from the Catechism, psalms were sung, and the Scriptures were expounded. These spiritual exercises were carried on until after five o'clock when the family enjoyed its first hot meal of the day. The Sabbath was brought to a close with family devotions consisting of psalms, long prayers, questions from the Catechism, and a lecture from the Scriptures or a devotional book. All these dreary religious duties completed, private prayers were said and the weary Christian retired.

On most Sundays someone appeared upon the pillory or cutty-stool (the stool of repentance) to be publicly rebuked for some moral delinquency or breach of the Lord's Day. Weekly meetings of the kirk sessions were chiefly concerned with such cases and many hours were consummed in minutely

examining the evidence against an offender. For discipline the sinner might have to stand before the kirk in sackcloth for several Sundays. When someone was ordered to "compear" (appear in answer to a summons" before the kirk session the comparatively innocent suffered most whereas the shameless suffered little; leniency was usually available to the rich but not to the poor. Refusal to obey the orders of the presbytery to stand rebuke incurred the dread sentence of excommunication. This involved the mysterious "being delivered over to Satan," banishment from the Church, and denial of its sacraments.[1] The threat of being an outcast from society and the infamy connected with excommunication usually brought the most contumacious individual to his knees. With the support of the civil magistrates, the Church had far reaching powers, and its fanatical authorities meted out judgments with equal gravity on all sins--even the most trivial.[2] Philosophers and literary men were not beyond the supposed authority of the Church, and David Hume personally experienced something of the bitter persecution which Christians directed against those who were bold enough to speak in opposition to their tenets and practices.

In the midst of eighteenth century spiritual enthusiasm and fervor, individuals of extreme religious devotion made dedications of their lives, their children, and their earthly

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[1]Graham, Social Life, p. 324.

[2]Ministers were required to make repentance before their congregations and presbyterial visitations of the churches were made to examine ministers and parishioners alike.

goods to God. "Trysts" or Covenants were written down and renewed year by year usually on the eve of Communion. In these pathetic documents one may read of the awe, the spiritual strivings and fear and trembling of a person lest he should not really belong to Christ.[1] Religious observances for even the simplest acts of social life were followed with almost superstitious concern. Blessings were asked for every refreshment, whether it be coffee, tea, or ale. Prayer was offered for anything and everything--especially by the devout and clergy. Guidance was sought for each journey or each decision, for the choice of a sermon text or when in states of grave spiritual doubts. If one was faced with problems, all he needed to do was prayerfully look to the Scriptures and Providence would guide him to the right passage to calm his mind. "In the early decades of the century the intense religious fervour and faith which characterised the covenanting days retained all its influence and hold over great masses of the people of all classes, and the belief in the potency of prayer and in the constant interference of Providence with every act of existence, however minute, was unbounded."[2] The laws of nature were regarded as conventional arrangements of Providence which could be changed, stopped or reversed simply by a prayer. In this egotistic concept, the Divine Being

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[1]For examples, see James Fraser, Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser of Brea, Minister of Culross (Aberdeen: George & Robert King, 1860), p. 212; Wodrow, Analecta, I, 79; Selections from the Family Papers preserved at Caldwell, ed. William Mure (Glasgow: The Maitland Club, 1854), I, 258.

[2]Graham, Social Life, pp. 336-337.

moved all creation to the events of each individual's private affairs; every calamity, every good fortune was "sent." The moods of the mind and the state of the body were interpreted as divinely ordained. If a minister's spirits were low, this was a sign of God's displeasure; if he was in good spirits and preached with vigor this was regarded as the Lord's approval.[1] "There was nothing that occurred, no incident however trivial, no circumstance however natural, which was not believed specially directed to help, punish, or discipline each mortal's life."[2]

In times of general calamity such as famine or flood, various alternative sins were listed and fasts were instituted--a common practice when faced with perplexity or emergency. Often it was difficult to determine whether an event had been wrought by the finger of Providence or the hand of Satan; and it was a matter of no small consequence to decide if a particular hardship was due to the Devil who was vexing a man or to Heaven who was punishing him. In this credulous age the Prince of Darkness held immense sway in the universe, in fact, the general view of that day appears to have been one of a duel between the powers of good and evil--each wielding the world of nature for opposing purposes. Unseen spiritual agents were

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[1]Alexander Carlyle, The Autobiography of Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, ed. John Hill Burton (London & Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1910), p. 24.

[2]Graham, Social Life, p. 339. For accounts of some of these so-called miraculous events see Wodrow, Analecta, I, 12; 150.

thought to influence man's life from birth to death,[1] and every extraordinary event was viewed with awe. Omens, charms, and relics of paganism and popish days still survived; and if assistance was not forthcoming from Heaven, many individuals sought aid from charmers and sorcerers. In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, witchcraft was looked upon with horror and profound belief[2] and a number of charges were brought before the kirk sessions, resulting in the death or banishment of many withered, old women.

As a result of the austerity and intensity of religious teaching which was inculcated by the ministrations of the Church and the spiritual exercises of the home, even the most upright individual had strange alternations of mood. The stern doctrine of election was given such a place of prominence that people found themselves at one time in abject despair and anxiety, doubtful of their salvation and at other times in inexpressible joy, confident that they belonged to Christ. A man's spiritual well-being was made to rest upon his emotions, and he believed he was saved or damned according to his varying mood or spirit. Piety was forced into a child's life and all that was bright and cheerful in religion was

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[1] Wodrow, Analecta, II, 330.

[2] In 1736 the Act against witchcraft was repealed. The Seceding ministers denounced the repeal as a godless deed and a repudiation of the Scriptural command not to allow a witch to live. Although a fear of witchcraft continued among the lower classes for some time, the educated people and most of the clergy soon gave up such a belief. See Thomas Somerville, My Own Life and Times 1741-1814 (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1861), p. 366.

excluded.[1] The good life was a negative life--somber and morbid--lacking in every enjoyment.

> . . . the pleasures of the world were taken sadly; boyish frolics were eyed askance, and sometimes with keen reprehension; dancing was a carnal excitement, cards a dangerous pastime, dicing was an impious game (for lots were appointed by God for holy purposes as recorded in Holy Writ), the theatre was the devil's play-ground, and dancing assemblies were the recruiting quarters for Satan's ranks. Books could not be too carefully chosen, for poetry was fanciful, and tales were frivolous and untrue; and such papers as the Tatler and Spectator were not fit for well-disposed minds. Even tolerant evangelicals did not venture to offend pious conventionalities. . . .[2]

Advocating enlightenment and lending his efforts to the "reawakening of Scotland," David Hume did not support the popular religious views and practices of his day. We shall see in subsequent chapters of this thesis that he made explicit statements against the superstition and ignorance manifested in the Church of Scotland and condemned the theological systems which fostered bigotry and fanaticism. We turn our attention now to the conflict which resulted from a reaction to the narrow theological thinking of the Scottish Church when the secular and scientific spirit began to grow and material interests began to challenge the authority of religion.

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[1]Wodrow, Analecta, I, 55; 86; 114-115; II, 336.

[2]Graham, Social Life, pp. 345-346. See also Ramsay of Ochtertyre, op. cit., II, passim; Caldwell Papers, II, 262; Carlyle, op. cit., p. 47.

Theological Conflict

The central doctrines of Scottish Calvinism may be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

> According to this document, Adam as the federal representative of the human race had determined its fate once and for all by violating that unfortunate covenant which he and the Deity had contracted with regard to the forbidden fruit. The vicarious sacrifice had indeed been offered; but the power to avail themselves of his expiation was to be communicated to only a few of the minority to whom it had been made known; and these were to be saved to show that God was merciful, as the rest were to be damned to show that he was just.[1]

The prominent theologies formulated on the basis of this Confession emphasized the negative aspects of Calvinism. This may be seen in the works of Professor Thomas Blackwell of Aberdeen, a typical exponent of the old Scottish Theology.[2] The works of Thomas Boston also represent the teachings of the Church at this time. Boston was popular both as a preacher and a writer; his communion services attracted many worshippers to hear his exhortations. Other Scottish ministers accepted his theology without question, and his books--the Crook in the Lot and the Fourfold State--were widely read throughout the century. Boston's grim theology was the theology of the Church and of the people; he is representative of the prevalent type of thought and feeling. The Analecta and Correspondence of Robert Wodrow provide excellent descriptions of the follies and virtues of the age. Wodrow was saturated with old notions, pious superstitions and quaint bigotries. Every tale of wonder,

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 225.

[2]For a brilliant picture of the theology of Blackwell and other divines of this period, see Graham, Social Life, pp. 393-416.

every word of a "saintly" man filled him with awe, reverence and devout conviction; and these incidents are faithfully recorded for the reader's edification.

Theological works, as well as the sermons of the day, turned upon the "Fourfold State of Man"--the state of innocence or primitive integrity; man's present helpless and sinful condition; redemption through the mediator; the future life of the elect and the reprobate.[1] The Schema Sacra of Professor Blackwell illustrates the legalistic view of religion which held complete sway over the minds of the people. The creed was mean and brutal; the beauty and significance of the Scripture were destroyed by legal phraseology, and religion resembled a process in a civil court. For example, in the story of creation, Blackwell formulates the "motions" and "resolutions" of the Council of the Trinity whose procedure resembles the meeting of a presbytery. The Divine Mind found that He could get "an additional revenue of glory by creating rational creatures who should sing eternal hallelujahs." "A motion was made" to this effect and was agreed to by the Council of the Three-in-One. The Trinity again assembled and created man to fill the blank in the architecture of the world: firstly, to declare God's perfections; to be a "covenanting party to transact with the Trinity"; to bring

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[1]The minister's choice of a text was largely accidental, and the phrases of the Scripture were distorted to fit the familiar doctrines of the creed. Consequently, there was very little fresh thought put into the sermons, which always concluded with practical applications and reflections. [See Carlyle, op. cit., p. 106.]

wild beasts to subjection "by the stateliness of his person, the majesty of his countenance, and the carefulness of his voice"; to prevent angels supposing all things were created for themselves; and, lastly, to "produce double return of declarative glory to God."[1]

In the present state of nature man finds himself utterly depraved and corrupt, under the wrath of God. This applies to every man, woman and child; nothing the natural or unregenerate man does avails him anything. If it should be objected that God was not fair in holding millions guilty for a fault committed by one man, we are told that it was "extremely kind" of God to make the fate of all future generations depend on Adam's conduct. In the words of Professor Blackwell:

> What could be more kind than for the Creator to accept the obedience of one man in the room of millions, and instead of exacting perfect obedience from each individual? What could be more fair than to make a covenant with a being formed perfect, and therefore the most likely to keep the bargain, than to require it of each and all, who would be more liable to break it? Surely if all mankind had been present in the garden of Eden, they would unanimously have agreed to such a proposal, and have chosen Adam as their representative.[2]

Thomas Boston agrees with this. "It was certainly an act of grace, favour, and admirable condescension in God", he says, to enter into a covenant, and such a covenant, with his own creatures."[3] The Divine contract is, indeed, binding on all

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[1]Thomas Blackwell, Schema Sacra: or, A Sacred Scheme of Natural and Revealed Religion (Aberdeen: George King, 1841), pp. 41-51; 72-74.

[2]Ibid., pp. 169-194.

[3]Thomas Boston, Human Nature in its Fourfold State; of

Adam's descendants because his posterity were present in his loins and thus parties to the bargain. "The Lord put all mankind's stock, as it were, in one ship; and, as we ourselves would have done, he made our common father the pilot."[1]

Since man's nature was considered as totally corrupt, it was stated that no good thought or desire could possibly enter the human heart.[2] Acts of virtue, desirable as they were, could not help towards salvation. It was the minister's solemn duty to show that unregenerate morality can never please God; to think otherwise was mortal sin. In man's present state of wrath and curse, to believe in the value of his own efforts at goodness was regarded as damnable heresy. Boston addresses the unregenerate in this fashion: "All thy religion, if thou hast any, is lost labour, as to acceptance with God, or any saving effect on thyself. Art thou yet in thy natural state? Truly, then, thy duties are sins. . . ."[3]

Descriptions of the consequence of total depravity were expressed with vigor and remorseless plainness of speech. All the descendants of Adam deserve everlasting and infinite torture. If an infant died before he reached an age to understand the mysteries of Calvinism, he must stand condemned for all eternity. Such a doom was just and deserved, it was incessantly argued; babes were lumps of wrath, children of

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Primitive Integrity; Entire Depravity; Begun Recovery; and Consummate Happiness or Misery (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1842), p. 22.

[1]Ibid., p. 26. [2]Ibid., p. 109. [3]Ibid., pp. 116-117.

hell.[1] Men destroy cockatrices in the egg or kill serpents at sight; God is just in condemning newly-born infants because of their original corruption as heirs of hell.

Ministers seemed to revel in descriptions of the eternal woes. With vivid imaginations they depicted the horrors of the nether world and the terrors of the Lord. "Everything in God is perfect of its kind and therefore no wrath can be so perfectly fierce as his."[2] Sermons contained blood-curdling details of the doomed enduring and watching untold agony;[3] it was emphasized that every sense would be tormented but it would be impossible to tell which was tormented the most. The miseries of the reprobate will never awaken compassion in God, angels, or saints.[4] Ghostly

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[1] Ibid., p. 112.

[2] Ibid., p. 141. Graham makes an interesting observation concerning the use of the word "wrath" in his edition of Boston's Fourfold State. It is stated that the word occurs so often that "the printer, in his despair at every W in all types having been used up--italics, capitals, and romans--has been obliged to employ two Vs: thus, "VVrath." [Graham, Social Life, p. 400.]

[3] The lost "are chained in everlasting horrible darkness: and, whilst others triumph in the presence of God and his angels, they have no other associates but grim and grizly devils . . . and, while others sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, these miserable creatures must howl and roar in everlasting despair." [William Crawford, Dying Thoughts; in Three Parts (Edinburgh: Alex. Brown, 1782), p. 28.]

[4] "The godly wife shall applaud the justice of the Judge, in the condemnation of her ungodly husband: the godly husband shall say 'Amen' to the condemnation of her who lay in his bosom: the godly parents shall say 'Hallelujah' at the passing of the sentence against their ungodly child: and the godly child shall, from the bottom of his heart, approve the condemnation of his wicked parents, the father who begat him, and the mother who bore him." [Boston, op. cit., pp. 415-416.]

pictures of the torments of the lost and vivid descriptions of the tortures of hell and the terrors of judgment to come occupied a prominent place in almost every sermon. It was fear the minister chiefly trusted to bring sinners to repentance. Such a creed had disastrous effects on morals, leading many self-conscious individuals to melancholy despair whereas those who considered themselves "elect" often lived a life of indifference to duty.[1]

According to the doctrine of election, God has arbitrarily chosen some out of the multitudes of the lost to be saved for His own pleasure and glory. The rest of humankind, however virtuous, are everlastingly doomed to hell. The elect only escape their righteous doom of endless torment by a sacrifice to God and by sufferings equalling in intensity those which the saved would otherwise be required to endure. Infinite vicarious agony being required to placate a holy God, the sacrifice could only be offered by One who was at once God and man--Jesus Christ.[2] The atonement made by the Son of God is treated as a legal transaction, in which God, Christ, and men are the several "parties" to a bond. The whole Calvinistic process of salvation is detailed in dry, technical,

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[1]It is said that lazy farmers left their crops to grow in weeds on the supposition that they should not interfere with the divine curse on the soil for Adam's sin. [Graham, Social Life, p. 399.]

[2]There were some clergymen, called the "affectionate preachers" who turned their hearers to love and gratitude for One who bore so much agony for sinners. Their tender appeals to move the congregation to faith were based on the ineffable grace of Christ rather than on the terror of God. [Ibid., p.408.]

and legal phrases. Christ is called the "Tryst," and man's "surety," having "stroke hands with God" to take man's place of punishment. Redemption is reduced to a mercantile transaction or vulgar bargain and the Deity is made to appear as a sharp, suspicious, legal practitioner. All the beauty of religion vanishes and the atonement is robbed of its finer moral and religious meaning in this grim "lawyer's" theology.[1]

The doctrine of election led to a dilemma and caused many individuals great concern over the assurance of their salvation. It was taught that God must be left entire liberty to choose whomsoever He pleased, and no credit could be given to His wretched and corrupt creatures if they happened to be elected. Yet, men were urged to seek grace and threatened with terrible penalties for failure to do so. Ministers fervently and tearfully begged men "to close with Christ's offer," "to get a grip on Him," "to have an interest in Him," "to embrace Him" or "to be espoused to Him." But if the Deity chooses for reasons inscrutable, it is difficult to see what a man could do to secure salvation. Logically and theologically the elect need do nothing; and as for the damned, there was nothing they can do. This emphasis on election led to alternating exultation and despair in pious Christians; one day they were full of certainty, the next they were in doleful doubt. Assurance of salvation was a matter of spiritual emotion and varied with a change of health or mood. "It was nothing but a game of chance for poor suffering humanity, and all the odds

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[1]Graham, Social Life, pp. 407-409.

were heavily against them. There was no trusting God to play fair--in any merely human meaning of the word."[1]

In comparison to its conception of Hell the Calvinistic view of Paradise was indeed disappointing. The imagination of the divines seemed to fail them when they attempted to describe the felicities of heaven. It was pictured without color or excitement; the joys and occupations of the elect consisted of ceaseless praise to the Deity and mutual discourse upon God's grace in saving them. Celestial happiness bore a marked resemblance to the Sabbath.[2] An everlasting prolongation of a Scottish Sabbath was a dull prospect to many minds. Praise, worship, and meditations ceasing neither night nor day did not make heaven worth attaining. Such a monotonous existence had its disadvantages in recommending repentance to sinners. This may partially explain the great emphasis placed on the torments of the damned. At least, the imagination found less difficulty in describing the eternal torments of the damned than in picturing the everlasting joys of the blessed.

This old Scottish Theology was attacked from several quarters and gradually gave way to more enlightened views. By the year 1720 the theological controversy in Scotland was gaining momentum. Prior to this time there had been fierce

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 40.

[2]It was a serious and searching question of that day whether one found the Sabbath here a burden and if so how he could expect to enjoy it forever in heaven. See George Brown, Diary of George Brown, Merchant in Glasgow, 1745-1753 (Glasgow: Thomas Constable, 1856), pp. 218-220.

and incessant controversy, but it had been ecclesiastical rather than theological. As we have noted, it had to do with the question of church government, whether by prelates or presbyters, and not with the fundamentals of the Faith or the doctrines of the Church. Speculations on these themes and even free expression of opinion regarding them were hardly known before the eighteenth century. There was little encouragement of free thinking in Scotland where unbelief was considered a crime and blasphemy was punishable by death. In such turbulent and stormy times, theological studies were not widely cultivated. When Stuart despotism was brought to an end and the hostilities of civil and ecclesiastical strife died down, an age of tranquillity began to dawn. The union of the two governments encouraged social, commercial and intellectual enterprise, and both Scotland and England benefited from an interchange of sentiment. One historian has summarized the situation in this way:

> The history of the Church of Scotland from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century may be described as that of the decline of fanaticism under a succession of powerful forces operating from without. Such a force were the victories of Cromwell which overthrew the ascendency of the zealots; such--if we look to their ultimate effect--were the persecutions of Charles II; such was the constructive statesmanship of William; such was the Darien agitation; such was the Union; and such . . . were the new conditions which the Union introduced. In so far as its effect can be traced in the speculative as well as in the practical sphere, this course of discipline tended rather to a loosening than to a disturbance of belief; but in the quiet years which succeeded the Revolution the Church was alarmed from time to time by incursions of the sceptical spirit. . . .[1]

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 218.

With the development of material interests in the seventeenth century, there came the growth of a secular spirit, and religion was gradually dethroned from its supreme place in the public counsels. "Thus it is that, subsequent to the Revolution, religion no longer constitutes the warp and woof of the story of the Scottish people, and becomes but one of the diverse strands of which the entire web is composed."[1] There were a number of concurrent factors which combined to bring about the subordination of spiritual interests. The Union of the Parliaments had been accomplished for the welfare of the nation in all its interests, and resulted in the development of trade, commerce, industry and natural resources.[2] As men and women became acquainted with the manners of other nations, prejudice was lessened and new notions were introduced into gardening, farming, syles of clothing and modes of living. With the changes in work and dress, there came also changes in ways of thinking. Communication with England brought more knowledge of literature and, consequently, wider views in religion.

The developing thought fostered by a scientific spirit began to question the "foundations on which Christian Europe had hitherto based its faith and its hopes."[3] The

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 185.

[2]There were some individuals who reacted against these developments and regarded improvements in human life as detrimental to the welfare of the soul. See Robert Wodrow, The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow, ed. Thomas M'Crie (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1842-1843), I, 67; Wodrow, Analecta, I, 218-219.

[3]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 186.

speculative spirit of such philosophers as Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza had opened the way to a critical evaluation of man and nature and consequently, of traditional religion which claimed to answer questions about God and man. By the eighteenth century, thinkers throughout Europe were more or less openly assailing both the origin and the content of the Christian faith. In the Church of England the latitudinarianism of Archbishop Tillotson dominated English theology and gave rise to controversies as to the nature and operation of the Trinity.[1] The Deists--Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Blount, Tindal and Toland--raised the question of the rival claims of natural and revealed religion. Hume Brown points out that the Deistic position found its "definitive expression in the Theologia Naturalis of Christian Wolff, in which it was proclaimed that reason was the philosopher's stone by which all knowledge and experience must be tested."[2] The watchword and battle-cry of the Aufklärung was reason and it was not long until a rational interpretation of theology began to arise. With the publication in 1696 of John Toland's Christianity not Mysterious, a mass of rationalist opinion became focussed on religious questions. The spread of rationalistic thought divided the theologians of every country and excited considerable alarm in Scotland. The Deistic controversy affected the life of Christianity not only as a system of doctrine but as a system of ethics. "In the history of religion in Scotland

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 219-220.

[2]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 186.

throughout the eighteenth century we discern the conflict of these tendencies underlying all the controversies that harassed and dismembered her national Church."[1]

The religious writings of the period indicate with what vividness the growing spirit of scepticism was recognized as an enemy of the foundations on which the Christian Faith had hitherto rested. Those individuals who followed the strict Covenanting path were grievously offended by latitudinarianism.[2] Nevertheless, the growing temper of the age made a reaction against a strict religion inevitable. The Church under Calvinism had taken much too narrow a view of its functions; its theocratic spirit was more Judaistic than Christian. The exacting supernaturalism of the Kirk had caused widespread discontent, and its concepts of the earthly reign of "saints" and a commonwealth based on the laws of the Bible had come to be questioned, even within the Church itself. Attempts were now being made to modify theology and to harmonize it with the new intellectual and social attitudes.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Robert Wodrow reflects the perplexity confronting a devout person who is curiously inquisitive of the novelties of speculation [Correspondence, II, 361, 391.] , and yet reads with fear and trembling the works of the arch-sceptic Pierre Bayle [Ibid., II, 12, 213.] . Wodrow is extremely disturbed that the Divinity Students of Glasgow "very openly oppose the Confession of Faith, and this spreads extremely through the young merchants and others. . . ." [Analecta, III, 170.] There are, of course, other events in the development of an enlightened attitude towards religion which distress him even more. Not only does he hear from Edinburgh of "secret Atheisticall Clubs" imitated from the Hell-fire Club in London [Ibid., 309.] , but also he witnesses the entrance into the ministry of clergymen known as "Bright Youth" or the "Oratoriall Preachers" [Ibid., IV, 238.] who feed their congregations the husks of heathen morality instead of the substance of sound doctrine.

There were, however, differences of opinion regarding the manner in which the Church should encounter these tendencies.[1] One class of ministers--the spiritual successors of the Covenanters--contended that the human intellect should not be allowed to examine Christian mysteries. They clung to "the Faith" that had been handed down to them, without in any way questioning its validity. They believed their religion to be true and that was the end of the matter; to suggest the possibility of error was a menace to the very foundation of belief. Like the Jansenists of France and the Pietists in Germany, these men held that religion could remain pure only as man renounces the unnecessary distractions of this life and looks forward to the tremendous prospect of the day of judgment. The Church could dwell with security within a rigidly defined sphere; to venture outside this entrenched ground would mean capitulation to the emeny. "In religion, as in theology, they conceived, the only security against the new peril lay in walking the way of their fathers."[2]

In another class of theologians it seemed that the opponents of Christianity should be met in quite a different way. Instead of withdrawing from the field of battle, the Christian should meet the enemy with the weapons of reason and accommodation. Once the doctrines of religion were adapted to common sense and its rules of conduct adjusted to the life of the average man, the impugners of Christianity

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 187-188.

[2]Ibid.

would be disarmed. It was indeed possible and necessary to place religion on a foundation from which it could not be dislodged. The opposition of these two approaches to the threat of rationalistic thought is discernable during the first half of the eighteenth century in Scotland, and the final result of their fundamental antagonism was the emergence of two mutually repellent and irreconcilable types of religion.[1]

The Church at this time was without a commanding mind to control opposing tendencies and give unity to its actions. Confronted with troubles from within the Kirk, the General Assemblies were unable to agree upon the means of dealing with the controversies which faced them.

> As the history of religion has shown, the most dangerous enemies of a church are the propounders of novel doctrines within its own fold; and its gravest responsibility is to mete judgment with charity to its erring sons. During the quarter of a century that followed the accession of George I, the absorbing business of the Church Courts was the consideration of heresies which in the opinion of the majority threatened the alternatives of schism or disintegration.[2]

Feeling against heresy was still strong in Scotland. In 1695 the Scottish Parliament ratified the Act of 1649 which made blasphemy a capital offence. In the following year the General Assembly issued a warning against "the atheistical opinions of the Deists." When we recall that as late as 1697 Thomas Aikenhead was hanged for blasphemy, it is with good reason that Mathieson states that "the ministers who had applauded the destruction of infidelity as represented by

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 189.

a penitent stripling were not likely to show much forbearance when some of their own number attempted to loosen the shackles of an iron-bound creed."[1]

The indirect cause of theological conflict in the Church of Scotland was a dispute that arose among the English Dissenters.[2] As the writings of these controversialists were being widely read, "the Scottish Church, so long ice-bound in orthodoxy, was beginning to shake itself free."[3] The actual disputes that arose during the first half of the century need not detain us;[4] the results of these controversies in bringing

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 222.

[2]The occasion of the controversy was the republication of the sermons of the Antinomian divine, Dr. Crisp. These sermons raised the question whether a man believed instinctively because he was justified, or whether he was justified on condition that he believed. Those who favored the second view were called Neonomians because they regarded faith as a new law distinct from the law of works. Neonomianism, allowing some scope to reason, tended towards rationalism, an impossible position for those who regarded faith as a supernatural gift. [See Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 226-227.] Mathieson also points out that Arianism, the forerunner of Unitarianism, took root among the Presbyterians at Exeter. The latitudianiarism spirit soon permeated the Presbyterians of Ulster, and in 1705 at Belfast a society was established which insisted "that conduct was more important than dogma, that honest doubt or error could never be a crime, and that candidates for the ministry should not be required to declare their assent to any human standard of belief." [Ibid., p. 227.] [Cf. W. E. H. Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902-04), III, 20-22.] The influence of these new intellectual thoughts in England and Ireland extended to Scotland also.

[3]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 228.

[4]The main difficulties that faced the Church and called for definite action on the part of the Courts were Bourignonism, the teaching of John Simson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, and the situation growing out of the condemnation of the Marrow of Modern Divinity. See Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 190-191; Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 222-234; Henry F.

about a more tolerant view in religion is of far more importance for our study.

A strong party within the Church was dissatisfied with the leniency shown in the treatment of the heretical teachings of Professor John Simson of Glasgow. When the Marrow of Modern Divinity (a favorite book of this party) was condemned, it became evident that a schism was inevitable. Conflict "elicited and accentuated an antagonism of tendencies within the national Church which was to be disastrous in the immediate future."[1] The result was the secession of a group of extremely zealous evangelicals. Men like Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, James Hog of Carnock and Thomas Boston revolted against the authority of the Church, contending that the Covenants had been neglected and the Establishment had become defective.[2]

For a year or two the Assembly tried various measures of conciliation in order to reclaim the Seceders. But the efforts of the Church to meet the Seceders' scruples and to

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Henderson, The Religious Controversies of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), pp. 5-16; 20-43.

[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 191.

[2]The main contention of the Seceders with the Church was over the question of patronage and the settlement of ministers. They claimed for the people a voice in the selection of pastors; consequently, when the Assembly of 1732 passed an Act decisively showing that its sympathies were no longer with popular election, the immediate occasion for secession was provided. Doctrinal differences were, of course, contributing factors to the schism, and eventually the time came when the General Assembly could no longer humor and coerce Erskine and his followers into subjection. See Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 192-195; Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 237-249; William Law Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1910), pp. 145-157; Graham, Social Life, pp. 371-382.

win them back were futile; they were not to be placated. The Church could not possibly meet their extravagent demands. In the year 1736 they published a manifesto called the "Judicial Testimony" which reviewed at great length the defections of the Established Kirk since the fall of Ultra-Presbyterianism in 1651. This verbose and fanatical work is an indictment of the Church and society at large and provides a declaration of the principles of the Seceders as well as a denouncement of the want of principle in the Establishment.[1]

The fanaticism of the Secession document indicated that these men could not have remained long in a Church which was moving onward with the times and was soon to be governed by a Moderate Party. The Seceders' position was in the Covenanting tradition which resisted change whether in dress, in farming, in social customs or in theology and worship. These stern fanatics clung to the old ways of the past with its hard and repulsive features and refused to recognize anything in progress but defection. They seemed to want the bitterness and ignorance, even the superstition and cruelty,

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[1]Some of the sins enumerated were: the failure to declare Presbytery to be of divine right; the failure to renew the Covenants; the failure to mourn for the sins of the land; Episcopal hirelings allowed to remain in their parishes; a union with England which was not on the lines of the old Covenanting union; toleration established by law; restoration of patronage; the condoning of heresy in the professor's chairs; condemnation of the Marrow of Modern Divinity; widespread immorality and sinful occasions of wantonness such as balls and night assemblies; repeal of the penal statutes against witches--a defiance of the law of God which said, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." [Act, Declaration and Testimony for the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government of the Church of Scotland; &. (Edinburgh: James Jaffray, 1737).]

of the seventeenth century reproduced in the eighteenth. They were stubborn and bigoted and their religion was repulsive because it arrogated to itself the exclusive possession both of principle and of piety. In a very real sense the Secession was an advantage, for it carried off many ill-humored individuals who would have disturbed the quiet and hampered the progress and development of the Church if they had remained in it.[1] Schism finally became complete in 1740 when the Seceders were formally deposed by the General Assembly,[2] the majority of its members accepting the principle that no order could be maintained in the Church if ministers refused to submit to the decisions of the Supreme Courts.

We shall see later how the conduct of the zealots greatly irked David Hume, who was himself a man of sociable and kindly disposition. He opposed religious enthusiasm as strongly as he did superstition and ignorance and became furiously angry at times--perhaps not without good reason. Hume was encouraged by the growth of a secular spirit in Scotland and agreed with certain aspects of the Moderate teaching

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[1] Graham, Social Life, p. 380.

[2] It is interesting to note the subsequent history of the Secession Church . The Covenants were renewed and imposed as a passport of admission for both ministers and members; separation was rigidly enforced by making it penal for any members to worship in a parish church. [See Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, p. 232.] Eventually the stubborn temper which had given rise to the Schism led to quarrels and controversies over points which were pointless and questions not worth answering. There were schisms within the Schism and secessions from the Seceders. [Ibid., pp. 232-233; Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 291; Graham, Social Life, pp. 376-79; Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 271-273.]

of the Church, which we now examine in more detail.

Growth of Moderatism[1]

The Covenanting tradition continued to be cherished by the masses and the Seceders were able to gather around them congregations composed largely of individuals who had become dissatisfied with the milder moral preaching of the "legal preachers." "One of the main points in the Secession reasons of disruption from the Established Church--and they spoke the mind of the Scottish evangelicals--was the introduction by the semi-rationalists of a utilitarian theory of morality and religion."[2] Many individuals felt that when the Assembly condemned the Marrow it identified itself with the growing humor of the times to turn religion into a mere morality.[3] But the influences of culture and learning were rapidly superseding the narrowness of thinking which had characterized previous ages. Patronage continued a burning issue and was opposed by a party of Evangelicals in the Establishment. It was claimed that patronage allowed the admission of ministers popularly supposed to be lukewarm or unsound. However, as

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[1]See the following works for extensive treatments of Moderatism: Hume Brown, op. cit., pp. 288-297; Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, pp. 250-263; Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, pp. 160-229; 240; Graham, Social Life, pp. 357-366; 414-416.

[2]H. F. Henderson, Religious Controversies, p. 42. In 1726 on the motion of Willison, who complained "that a scandal was like to arise from legal preaching of morality, and sermons where nothing of Christ was," an Act was drafted against the new style of preaching. [Wodrow, Correspondence, III, 247, 257.]

[3]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 191.

Moderatism became dominant in the universities, there was a growing reluctance to admit the popular claims.

The old theology in its endeavor to make God supreme in all aspects of life had depreciated and opposed the revival of learning and literature. Attempts were made to keep the universities subservient by making all professors subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and freedom was restricted in matters of science and philosophy. As latitudinarian ideas spread throughout Scotland, "a natural reaction took place against Calvinistic teaching, emphasising the sovereignty and abiding presence of God, the insufficiency of reason, and the continual need of the Holy Spirit's help for the highest life."[1] The national mind woke up to the necessity of cultivating the intellectual as well as the industrial side of life. Edinburgh, which had been gloomy and lethargic since the beginning of the century, began to revive. Citizens looked ahead as talk of improvements circulated. Old ways and ideas were criticized, and men and women sought a livelier existence. Less attention was given to the strict prohibitions of the Church as the fierce spirit of fanaticism disappeared under milder influences. Ignorance and superstition were finally giving away. Even the power of the "wild clergy" diminished; the old school of gospel ministers, with their stern doctrines and menaces of judgment, were less reverenced--their denunciations no longer terrorized, their whine ceased to impress the educated classes.

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[1]Rose, op. cit., p. 116.

The spirit of moderatism can be traced as far back as the reign of William in 1690 when intolerance began to wane.[1] Professor Simson is usually considered the true pioneer of liberalism, but there were others who also contributed to the growth of a moderate spirit in the Church.[2] The temper of the universities changed as men with broad and genial principles of toleration and respect for conscientious conviction entered the professorial ranks. Doctrines "which formerly set forth the Deity as despotic, arbitrary, and vengeful--even though they might be logically true to their creed--were placed in an aspect more in harmony with humanity and not less true to divinity."[3] Gradually, as a better quality of men went to the universities, ministers with refinement, culture, and breeding took their places among the clergy. Pulpit

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 251.

[2]Professor Chalmers of Aberdeen and Professor Hamilton of Edinburgh strongly supported Simson. The year of Simson's suspension, Francis Hutcheson was appointed to the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow. Hutcheson developed Shaftesbury's idea of a moral sense "which approves and recommends such dispositions as tend most to the public good." In Hutcheson's philosophy there was an attempt to prove the existence of a "most benign Universal parent." His optimistic ethical teaching tended to harmonize Christianity with paganism--emphasis was placed upon the beauty of moral virtue, the harmony of the passions, and the dignity of human nature. See William Robert Scott, Francis Hutcheson, His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: University Press, 1900).

William Leechman, Professor Campbell of Aberdeen, the two William Wisharts, George Wishart, and Robert Wallace were also outstanding leaders in the early years of the Moderate movement. See Ramsay of Ochtertyre, op. cit., I, 240, 249, 279; Nathaniel Morren, Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1838, 1840), I, 318; II, 392-395.

[3]Graham, Social Life, p. 415.

eloquence developed and coarseness of diction, manner and thought gave way as learned clergymen began to enjoy the esteem of the people.[1] The young Scottish ministers differed from the older fanatical evangelical preachers and tended to adopt an ethical and undogmatic style of preaching. Criticism was often directed against them for their milder type of sermon with less damnation and more morality.[2] In the Church courts heated debates often arose between the two parties--the legal preachers or moralists and the evangelicals or high-flyers.

The Moderates, revolting against both the theocratic ideal of Scottish Presbyterianism and its narrow moral code, led a movement within the Church for the raising of the intellectual and social status of the clergy, for the elimination of enthusiasm and superstition, and for the harmonious relations between Church and State. Moderatism was another manifestation of the general movement known as the awakening of Scotland. In sympathy with the spirit of Latitudinarianism in England and the spirit of Enlightenment in Germany, the Moderate Party attempted to effect an understanding with the world. Industrial expansion had diverted the minds of many individuals from the theological interests of the past; there was a concern

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[1] Ramsay of Ochtertyre, op. cit., I, 219-308.

[2] Caldwell Papers, I, 268. Wodrow regarded the new school of clergy as "vivid sparks," "bright youths," "conceited, exacting and dogmatic," men who "woefully evaporate on questions and debates too high for them" and advocated a paganized Christianity savoring of Socrates and Seneca. [Wodrow, Correspondence, I, 46-61.]

for the problems of this life and less thought about the next. Tendencies of scepticism and inquiry, widely prevalent among the educated classes, called for an effort to adjust the Church to the new scene of thought manifested in theology and religion as well as in speculative philosophy. Moderatism attempted to meet this demand for adjustment and gave its character to ecclesiastical policy during the latter half of the eighteenth century.[1]

The creed of the Moderate Party was not formally stated and wide latitude of opinion was allowed.[2] Such individuals as William Robertson, the famous historian, Hugh Blair, the distinguished preacher, and Thomas Reid, the great philosopher, indicate that men of culture, taste, and broadmindedness were now in the ranks of the Party. To a large degree the Moderates left theology and dogma alone, and in contradistinction to traditional theology they preached the plain duties of daily life--honest, charity, and good-neighborliness. One of the salient characteristics of the group was an emphasis on good works rather than faith, and on the ethical teaching to be found in the Bible rather than on its mysteries.[3] The crude opinions of the old school of theology was left to the Secederes.

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 289.

[2]Individual professors adjusted the creed to the idiosyncrasies of their own minds and tempers. Some ministers were content to preach "heathen morality" [see Carlyle, op. cit., p. 290], whereas others faintly tinged their sermons with emotion which had its source in their own sympathetic temperament, rather than in any spiritual rapture. [Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 289.]

[3]Ibid.

The harsher tone of the past changed to milder strains in conformity to the reaction among the educated laity against the fanatical spirit and teaching. Enthusiasm in religion was distrusted, and zeal was looked down upon as savoring of a self-righteous attitude. Many of the Moderate clergy attached no mystical significance to faith and tended to minimize the supernatural. The more philosophical members of the clergy magnified reason and emphasized the natural goodness and self-sufficiency of man's nature and its power under the guidance of reason and culture to reach the highest results.[1] Human nature being naturally good, man is capable of gaining salvation by good behavior, in obedience to conscience and reason.

Thus, from a doctrinal point of view, the tendency of the Moderates was towards a relaxation of the rigid theories of Calvin and the adoption of undisguisedly rationalistic views. This drift to "mere morality" and rationalism, with its emphasis upon reason and good works rather than upon the "mysteries of revealed religion," led to charges of Socinianism and Deism against the Moderate Party.[2] The movement of rationalism became a dominant one in the eighteenth century and in Scotland the Age of Reason produced Moderatism.[3] Being rooted in the rationalism of the period, Moderatism embraced the doctrine of the all-sufficiency of human reasoning. This

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[1]Rose, op. cit., p. 116.

[2]Robert Rait and George S. Pryde, Scotland (2nd ed., London: Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1954), p. 263.

[3]A. J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 34.

concept David Hume completely repudiated, but he found it easy to ally himself with the Moderates in their literary endeavors.

In so far as Moderatism formulated a standard of Christian conduct it was removed from the traditions of the Covenants. The pleasures of life were not banned and the clergy came into closer contact with society. A member of the Church was taught "to realize that he was also a member of Society which had its own legitimate sphere and function."[1] By identifying themselves with the growing taste for literature, philosophy and science, the Moderates were able to contribute to the great and wholesome change wrought by the Awakening in Scotland.

During the years 1750-1770 the Church held a high place in attainments, position, and esteem. Its literary and cultured clergy expended practical energy for advancement and improvement in trade and agriculture as well as in literature.[2] The General Assembly was composed of men of ability, and ministers of distinguished talents entered into debates with elders who were among the most accomplished and brilliant Scotsmen.[3] The Assembly of 1754 included among its elders, nine peers and five lords of session; a great many of the

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 290.

[2]The Moderates had what the Evangelicals lacked--the genius of literary expression. Most of the evangelical literature of the eighteenth century was entirely divorced from letters and was written in a local style which soon passed away. Many of these theological treatises defied both grammar and philosophy.

[3]Henry Mackenzie, "An Account of the Life and Writings of John Home," prefixed to The Works of John Home, Esq. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1822), p. 61.

other members were baronets, lairds, and advocates of high standing at the bar and in society.[1] In Edinburgh the clergy, by their rank and ability, were in the highest circles of society and exerted great influence both socially and intellectually.

The policy of the Moderates was largely determined by their type of religion. They endeavored "to fill the Church with ministers who by their teaching and social qualities would commend religion to the classes whose adhesion it was the interest of a national church to secure."[2] To effect harmonious relations between Church and State, supremacy was given to the civil law and strict observance of the powers of the various bodies within the Church was required. The latter scheme meant a due subordination of the Church's different Courts, "involving the supreme jurisdiction of the General Assembly in all matters under dispute."[3] It was argued that just as discipline was a keystone of the social fabric and when denied led to rebellion and anarchy, so also the subordination of inferior courts was necessary to the very existence of the Church. Indifferent to the scruples of the evangelical clergy and to the wishes of the people, the Moderates carried out the law of patronage. The rights of patrons to presentation were rigidly enforced, since the congregations as a whole tended to select bigots of the strict

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[1]Graham, Social Life, p. 359.

[2]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 290.

[3]Ibid., p. 292.

covenanting faith. Thus, doubting the capacity of the people to judge what kind of minister would be best for them, the Moderates were reconciled to patronage which tended to favor their own type. In spite of protests and secession, the Church advanced towards a complete acceptance of the patronage laws,[1] and Moderatism entered its heyday, chiefly because "it reflected the tone of the educated opinion of the day."[2]

Meanwhile the Kirk of Scotland was by no means without its Evangelical Party which gained support from the masses who desired a more devotional type of preaching than that supplied by the Moderate clergy. The popular party, sometimes disparagingly called the Highflyers or Wild Party, "made their voices heard in the Assembly, and not ineffectually."[3] They "repudiated the doctrine of their opponents as worthy of 'priests beyond the Sea,' and as raising ecclesiastical rule to a pitch which had never been attained in civil affairs . . . and they insisted that both conscience and private judgment must be stifled if a man was to yield unquestioning obedience up to the point at which he became

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[1]The Moderate policy was so strongly advocated and vigorously carried out that unfortunate results ensued. In 1752 Thomas Gillespie was deposed for disobeying the orders of the Assembly while others as contumacious as himself were left unpunished. This harsh, high-handed measure of the Moderates to make Gillespie the scapegoat eventually led to the formation of the Relief Church in 1761. See Graham, Social Life, pp. 379-80; Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, pp. 166-169; Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 293.

[2]Ibid., p. 293.

[3]Ibid. The Highflyers were the cause of much animosity being directed against David Hume. See infra, pp. 274-279.

willing to withdraw from the Society or to concur in its dissolution."[1] Many people to whom religion was of prime importance resented the loss of a right to choose their own ministers; consequently, the number of meeting-houses outside the Establishment increased as worshippers joined the Seceders. This ominous outlook for the future of the Church was seized upon by the Evangelicals as an opportunity of pressing home what they alleged was the main cause of defection, and by 1766 the reign of the Moderates began to be disputed.[2] In 1781 Robertson resigned the leadership of the party and four years later the Evangelicals came into power.

Moderatism had been the result of a general movement of thought--the Intellectual Revival which swept over Europe. A later evangelical generation deplored the reign of the Moderates "as a period of spiritual deadness, of neglected parishes, of unvisited people, of forsaken death bed and comfortless preaching."[3] But in point of fact, Moderatism even with all its faults, brought about many good things in Scotland. It directed attention to science, philosophy, and literature and did much to broaden men's minds. The discipline of the Church was relaxed and public penance abolished; tolerance and culture were advocated and moral principles preached. The Moderates offered a religion that was cool, respectable and rational; they disbelieved in overmuch zeal. Yet, their

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[1]Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, p. 157.

[2]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 294.

[3]Graham, Social Life, p. 363.

gospel of culture rested on a superficial estimate of human nature and was insufficient when confronted with the grim realities of life. The theory of the natural goodness of man proved to be a poetic imagination and met with considerable evangelical opposition during the time of the French Revolution. "In 1781 appeared Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, which gave the deathblow to the rational philosophy of Wolff of which Moderatism was only a modified manifestation."[1] Hence, the ultimate defeat of the Moderates' doctrine of the all-sufficiency of reason was brought about, and the way was made for new waves of evangelicalism to sweep Scotland in the following century.

The following estimate was made by the historian, William Law Mathieson:

> . . . the Moderates, for the most part, were undogmatic preachers, polished gentlemen, men of the world; . . . the chief object of their policy was to foster in the Church an enlightened, rational, tolerant spirit; and . . . --if we may compare small things with great--they had no more compunction in using patronage to crush popular prejudice and passion than had a Pombal or a Joseph II in employing for a similar purpose the resources of absolute power. We may smile at liberalism so illiberal; but the alarm excited by the up-rising of the masses and the tyranny of half-educated opinion, which followed their partial emancipation, were equally detrimental to the progress of thought; and some three-quarters of a century were to elapse before religious and scientific speculation recovered the freedom it had lost.[2]

Religion in Scotland in the eighteenth century was characterized by the rivalry of two main theological positions. The sentimental type of religion, exemplified in the Calvinism

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[1]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 295.

[2]Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, p. 240.

of the early years of the century and carried on in the thought of the Secederes, based its system primarily on feeling and tended to foster superstition and fanaticism. In opposition to this the Moderates in the Church formulated a religion based on reason and emphasized the importance of morals in life here and now. David Hume did not entirely accept or completely repudiate either of these views. He saw the truth in the sentimentalist's claim that religion is a matter of faith or belief and rests more on feeling than on reason; but he was perturbed at the excesses of fanaticism and enthusiasm which developed in the lives of people who advocated this view. Hume denied one of the basic postulates of the Moderate Party--that reason is the basis of religion--but he agreed whole-heartedly with their ecclesiastical policies of patronage and tolerance, with their desire to advance learning and to bring about an enlightenment in Scotland and with their ideas concerning the importance of morals in the religious life. As we shall see later, Hume believed there was a definite place for reason in the formulation of moral and religious systems, but he did not agree that they could be based on reason and defended rationally--as the Rationalists and Deists attempted to do. We are now ready to study the life and work of David Hume in an effort to understand his attitude towards religion as he experienced it in his own age.

CHAPTER III

DAVID HUME - STUDENT OF HUMAN NATURE, 1711-1734

Introduction

David Hume was without doubt greatly influenced by the ecclesiastical events of the eighteenth century. The formative years of his life were exposed to theological opinions and religious practices which had a lasting effect upon his thought. It will only be possible to indicate, in a general way, the nature of these religious influences because we have very few particulars concerning Hume's youth. But since the education of every man begins at home, it is of the utmost importance to learn as much as we can about the early training of David Hume, the erudite scholar and bold man of letters.

Boyhood Years at Ninewells

Hume says no more about his education than that he "passed through the ordinary course of education with success."[1] His father, who died when David was still an infant, had no opportunity of aiding in the intellectual development of his youngest son. Hume tells us in his short autobiography:

> My Family, however, was not rich; and being myself a younger Brother, my Patrimony, according to the Mode of my Country, was of course very slender. My Father, who passed for a man of Parts, dyed, when I was an Infant, leaving me, with an elder Brother and a Sister, under the care of our

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[1] Letters, I, 1.

> Mother, a woman of singular Merit, who, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the rearing and education of her Children.[1]

This was written when Hume was sixty-five years of age and indicates that his mother had much to do with the training of her children. Although we cannot determine the full extent of this influence on David, it may be stated that he owed a heavy debt of obligation to his mother for a great deal of his early intellectual training. That he recognized this and that the mother was held in tender affection by her son is illustrated from two extant letters. Writing in the year 1743 to Alexander Home, David Hume says, "I shall endeavour to make the Town some Amends, Tho' later than I at first intended, because of my Mother's bad State of Health, whom I am unwilling to leave for any time, in her present Condition."[2] Again in a letter of 1745 he mentions "My Mother's Death, which makes such an immense void in our Family."[3] There is also the story of his reaction when the announcement of her death reached him in London. Alexander Carlyle repeats what Patrick Boyle, one of Hume's most intimate friends, told him on the subject:

> When we were talking of David, Mrs. Carlyle asked Mr. Boyle if he thought David Hume was as great an unbeliever as the world took him to be? He answered, that the world judged from his books, as they had a right to do; but he thought otherwise, who had known him all his life, and mentioned the following incident. When David and he were both in London, at the period when David's mother died, Mr. Boyle, hearing of it, soon after went into his apartment--for they lodged in the same house--when he found

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[1] Letters, I, 1.

[2] Letters, I, 54.

[3] New Letters, p. 17.

> him in the deepest affliction and in a flood of tears. After the usual topics of condolence, Mr. Boyle said to him, 'My friend, you owe this uncommon grief to your having thrown off the principles of religion; for if you had not, you would have been consoled by the firm belief that the good lady, who was not only the best of mothers, but the most pious of Christians, was now completely happy in the realms of the just.' To which David replied, 'Though I throw out my speculations to entertain and employ the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of mankind as you may imagine.'[1]

There are three points in this passage which have an important bearing on our present study. First, in reference to his mother's death, Hume was said to have been deeply grieved which leads us to conclude that he had a high regard for her and cherished her memory; he was conscious of the profound influence she had exerted over his life. Second, if we are to take Boyle's comments as trustworthy (and there is no reason why we should think otherwise in this connection), Hume's mother was regarded as a pious Christian as well as a devoted parent. It is highly probable, then, that in her concern for the spiritual development of her children, David's mother was the first person to introduce religious topics to his mind. Third, (and there is some difficulty as to what we are to take the statement really to mean) Hume says that his speculations were directed towards the "learned and metaphysical world" and that in the other things of life his thoughts were very much like the rest of mankind. A discussion of this third observation will be presented in a subsequent chapter. At this point, we wish to examine the religious influences

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[1]Carlyle, op. cit., p. 287.

Hume met in his home and in the parish school and kirk at Chirnside.

The ecclesiastical controversies and the theological teachings which Hume encountered in Scotland in the beginning of the century have already been discussed in Chapter Two; the problem now before us has to do with the effect of eighteenth century religious life upon him. In religion, the Home[1] family were Presbyterian, members of the Established Church. It is quite certain that the three children of Joseph and Katherine Home were baptized as infants and remained members of the Church of Scotland throughout their lifetimes. An entry in the Edinburgh baptismal Register runs as follows: "Edinburgh, 26th Aprile 1711 [O. S.] . Mr. Joseph Home of Ninewells, advocat, and Katherine Ffalconer, his lady. A S[on] N[amed] David. W[itnesses]: George, Master of Polworth, Sir John Home of Blackadder, Sir Andrew Home, advocat, and Mr. Alexander Ffalconer Junior, advocat. Born this day." In the margin an annotator of the Register has written: "The child here registered is the celebrated David Hume Historian and

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[1]David Hume made the change in the spelling of his name sometime between the years 1726 and 1734. Greig surmises that there were hidden motives for the change and suggests that it dates from a time of crisis when Hume had fallen out of sympathy with his family. He had disappointed them in their plans for his occupation and even went so far as to repudiate their religious beliefs. All this points to an emotional rather than a rational motive and Greig contends the change in spelling symbolizes revolution or independence and a break with what was past. [See J. Y. T. Greig, David Hume (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), p. 25-26.] That the change in spelling did not take place before 1726 is indicated by the fact that in a set of Shaftesbury's Characteristics there is the signature "Da: Home" with that date. See infra, p.116.

Philosopher."[1]

As far as David was concerned, he appears to have felt no close ties with the Church after his university days when a new scheme of thought was opened to him. He had very little to do with the clergy until about 1753 when be became friends with some of the members of the Church of Scotland. That Hume remained, nevertheless, a member of the Church may be inferred from the overture brought before the General Assembly in the year 1755. The Assembly was requested to censure Hume for his heretical writing and those demanding trial contended that he had been baptized by the Church and had never renounced his baptism. They went on to argue that he frequently referred in his books to "our holy religion" and that he was known to associate with professing Christians who voluntarily communicated with him. Some clergymen were even in the habit of visiting him, which it was presumed they would not be likely to do if he had openly separated himself from the Church. In effect it was complained that Hume "retained the Christian name, when he had forfeited all right to it." For these and other reasons, it was argued that he should be formally excluded by the Assembly.[2]

Although the Assembly under the leadership of the Moderates declined to prosecute Hume, there is no evidence that he did not in fact consider himself a rightful member of

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[1]"Parochial Registers, Co. of Edinburgh. B. 1708-14"; Vol. 685 (i), no. 15, New Register House, Edinburgh.

[2]"An Account of the debate upon the motion for censuring infidel writers," in Scots Magazine, XVIII, (June 1756), 280-284. See infra, pp. 281-284.

the Church. There was much that he felt compelled to criticize in the rationalistic apologetics of natural religion and the attempts to establish the Gospel of Christ on principles of human reason. Likewise, there certainly were doubts in his mind as to whether the human ecclesiastical institutions which had been established up to that time had had any value as agencies for the expression of religious ideas. As far as Hume was able to determine, the Church had not done much for the betterment of human morality, a basic interest for him. There was a deep conflict between Hume and the Church of Scotland; between Hume and the religion of his day. But, as far as we can discover, Hume was not opposed to a religion based on faith and it appears that he hoped to establish the grounds for a philosophical theism by means of his own religious enquiries. Until some better means of expressing a true religion of mankind was found, Hume seems never to have felt it necessary to renounce his membership in the Church. He did, in fact, associate with various members of the Moderate party from whom he received much enjoyment in intellectual discussions and social fellowship. But this is to get ahead of the story; we must go back to the years of Hume's boyhood.

The quiet country dwelling at Ninewells was the scene of David's early training. It was here that he returned many times in later life; he seemed to find its retirement profitable for his abstract thinking and historical studies. David owed a large part of his education to his mother, and she would be likely to recognize very early his intellectual ability

and originality of thought. John Hill Burton describes her in the following terms:

> . . . Mrs. Home was evidently an accomplished woman, worthy of the sympathy and respect of her distinguished son, and could not have failed to see and to appreciate from its earliest dawnings the originality and power of his intellect. Her portrait . . . represents a thin but pleasing countenance, expressive of great intellectual acuteness.[1]

Ernest Campbell Mossner, a present day biographer of Hume, conjectures that David's mother must have been independent and firm of mind and affectionate of nature. "The Ninewells family presumably attended church regularly (as they were, in fact, required to do by law) and were regarded as religious and god-fearing people. All surviving comment on Katherine Home indicates that she was sincerely and deeply religious."[2] But for more than such general descriptions we are at a loss to characterize the lady who had such a great influence on our philosopher-to-be.

There has been much speculation concerning the meaning of a reputed saying of Hume's mother: "Our Davie's a fine good-natured crater, but uncommon wake-minded."[3] Huxley finds this utterance perplexing and cannot believe Hume's mother was so obtuse as to make such a statement about her great son.[4] Burton tries to explain it as resulting from an observation of

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[1]John Hill Burton, Life and Correspondence of David Hume (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1846), I, 294n. The portrait Burton was describing has seemingly disappeared.

[2]Ernest Campbell Mossner, The Life of David Hume (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1954), p. 27.

[3]Burton, op. cit., I, 294n. [4]Huxley, op. cit., p. 2.

David's phlegmatic and unimpassioned disposition and states that "the anecdote is not characteristic of either party."[1] Calderwood's treatment of this supposed judgment by Hume's mother is indeed both interesting and plausible.[2] He believes the saying could hardly be an invention and attempts to explain it in terms of Hume's questioning and doubting when others had no doubt. It would be the natural thing for a mother, affectionately interested in her son's intellectual well-being, to notice the character of many of his questions. These utterances were seemingly too advanced for a child and demanded some deep thinking on the part of the parent if any answer was to be given. Calderwood concludes that Hume's mother "would have been startled, probably irritated, had she been told that she meant to suggest 'stupidity' as characteristic of her David, even when his talk showed a disregard of common sense. His was an uncommon weakness, associated with uncommon acuteness."[3]

J. Y. T. Greig[4] also deals with the traditional saying and regards it as at least well invented and very possibly a genuine one. His reasoning differs from Calderwood's however, in regard to the meaning of the statement. Greig argues that David's mother was concerned with her children's firm establishment in life and it was her younger son "who was proving to be a wayward and eccentric child." He had abandoned law in order

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[1]Burton, op. cit., I, 294.

[2]Calderwood, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

[3]Ibid., p. 14.

[4]Greig, op. cit., p. 66.

to spend his time in reading and writing down his thoughts. It is suggested that laxity in attending Church services, arguments with Hume's minister uncle, and disputations about holy Gospel truths would cause consternation to Mrs. Home's mind. Not only had David appeared to have lost his religion but he was also ambitious to be a famous man of letters--a thing which the wife of a Scots laird would consider "foreign, English and unnecessary." Mossner quite aptly remarks: "The good Lady of Ninewells may be forgiven for her seeming obtuseness in view of her son's mental and physical anguish of the following five years [after his abandoning the law in 1729] and of his financial problems of the following fifteen years."[1] Of course anything that may be said about the statement of Hume's "uncommon wake-mindedness" must be merely speculative, and the several explanations may each, in fact, contain an element of the truth. But if we accept Greig's interpretation of the statement, it should be kept in mind that Hume's "complete loss of religion" was simply the judgment of a very pious mother and need not have expressed his own feeling about the matter.

We cannot tell for certain where the family lived between the years 1711-1713 when Joseph Home was still alive; but it seems probable that when he died, the widow and her children resided most of the time at Ninewells until the sons were old enough to attend the University, when they would then move to their own Edinburgh house. The library to be found at

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 66.

Ninewells was no doubt meager; it very probably contained some of Joseph Home's books on law, the Bible, (and the Catechisms), together with some Latin classics. Greig makes the following conjecture about the books contained in the house where Hume grew up:

> It is pretty certain that his mother would possess, and now and then read, several pious works, such as Geddes's The Saint's Recreation, and a few books of sermons; she might also have the Book of Palmistry, a herbal, and at least one Rules of Good Deportment. Of real literature the house is not likely to have boasted more than twenty volumes all told--let us say a Virgil, and a Livy, Cicero's Orations, Pliny's Natural History, Dryden's Poems, half a dozen Tatlers and Spectators, and more doubtfully a Shakespeare.[1]

Greig is inclined to believe that it is very unlikely that Hume acquired his passion for literature at home; neither is there reason to suppose that he met with the authors of polite letters at the parish school at Chirnside where he and his brother John probably received their first formal education. The Laird of Ninewells was the chief man of substance in Chirnside; he and the parish minister George Home, who was David's uncle by marriage, decided where there should be a school and who should be the teacher. It would certainly not be to their interests to have someone who was other than completely orthodox, as a schoolmaster for their children. Thus, Greig contends, we may feel pretty certain that Hume did not become acquainted with the literature that was to arouse in him the "ruling Passion of my Life, and the great Source of my Enjoyment," until his university days or after.

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 33.

Mossner, on the other hand, takes a somewhat different view and believes that "the library of a family of upwards of two centuries in the same place, though perhaps no scholar's haven, would not have been inadequate for the early education of the children; and with so many lawyers in and connected with the family, there would also have been a fair number of professional works."[1] Basing his argument on Hume's statements that he was reading at an extremely young age,[2] Mossner remarks:

> Without being fanciful and without attempting to endow him with the literary precociousness of the admirable Crichton, or even of the more recent Bentham-Macaulay-Mill variety, it is yet necessary to provide this 'infant' David with home-reading materials in literature beyond the obvious school textbooks, the family Bible and Catechisms and religious works, and the ancestral legal tomes. I have little hesitation, therefore, in furnishing Ninewells with a fair range of the Latin Classics in prose and poetry, a few of the Greek, a few more of the French, and a miscellaneous lot of the English, including, certainly, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden, as well as the more recent Tatlers and Spectators and Pope . . . . Yes, beyond all fear of contradiction, David Hume acquired his passion for literature and nurtured his ambition to become a man of letters at the family home.[3]

Be this as it may, the youth David Hume was vitally interested in letters by the year 1727 when he wrote, ". . .

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 16.

[2]"You must know then that from my earliest Infancy, I found alwise a strong Inclination to Books and Letters." [Letters, I, 13.]
"I . . . was seized very early with a passion for Literature which has been the ruling Passion of my Life, and the great Source of my Enjoyments." [Letters, I, 1.]
"Had I a Son I shou'd warn him as carefully against the dangerous Allurements of Literature as K James did his son against those of Women; tho' if his Inclination was as strong as mine in my Youth it is likely, that the warning would be to as little Purpose in the one case as it usually is in the other." [Letters, I, 461.]

[3]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 30-31.

just now I am entirely confined to my self & Library for Diversion. . . ."[1] This, by the way, was a lad of only sixteen speaking and from the tone of the rest of the letter it is quite apparent that the writer had been employed in intellectual pursuits for quite some time. A further piece of evidence confirming Hume's early acquaintance with literature has recently been discovered.[2] In the library of the University of Nebraska there is a three-volume set of Shaftesbury's Characteristics, third edition (1723). Each volume is signed "Da: Home" and dated 1726 indicating that Hume had acquired the set at the age of fifteen. Whether he was actually interested in literature before the university years of 1722-23 is difficult to say, but David certainly was introduced to philosophical works at this time as we shall note very shortly. His phrase "earliest Infancy" may or may not be taken as literally referring to the very beginnings of his intellectual activities. Nonetheless, the age of eleven years is an early age to be seized with a passion for literature which was to continue throughout a lifetime. Hume frequently spoke of returning "to Books, Leizure, & Solitude in the Country," and of "an inward reluctance to leave my books, and leisure and retreat." In 1747 he was confronted with the decision whether to "return to my Studies at Ninewells" or to remain in London.[3]

In his biography of David Hume, Greig makes the statement

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[1] Letters, I, 9.

[2] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 31.

[3] Letters, I, 9, 111; New Letters, p. 25.

that the question of religion in Hume's life is important and "we can never hope to understand David Hume the man, and his ways of thought, without an understanding of the Scottish Kirk, its discipline, its form of worship, and its doctrines."[1] He then proceeds to describe the Scottish Calvinism of the early eighteenth century. This presentation, though somewhat speculative at times, is on the whole a good analysis of the religious influences that were brought to bear on Hume when still a boy. But Greig accepts the traditional interpretation of Hume as an infidel or atheist and endeavors to show how infidel opinions first arose in Hume's mind and fructified in the Treatise. It would be well for us to note briefly some of the influences Greig has pointed out and then go on to see upon what evidence the traditional view of Hume as an infidel is based. Hume certainly repudiated the kind of religion he was acquainted with in his youth, but it is by no means certain that this change of attitude can be taken to mean a complete rejection of all religion.

During the years 1704-1741 the kirk at Chirnside was pastored by the Reverend George Home who had married Joseph Home's sister.[3] Being David Hume's uncle, we may feel quite certain that George Home would be concerned with his nephew David's religious training. We are unable to tell with certainty what type of theology he stood for, but Greig presents a number of good reasons for believing that Home was one of

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 36. [2]Ibid., pp. 63-108.

[3]Hew Scott, op. cit., II, 34-35.

the zealots, "the godly ministers" or Evangelicals of that day.[1] For one thing, the parish at Chirnside was known for a Presbyterianism of the truculent, uncompromising attitude. In 1676 some forty Covenanters were proscribed for attendance at conventicles and later in 1689 the Reverend Henry Erskine, father of Ralph and Ebenezer, the Seceders, was the Chirnside minister; he had been imprisoned several times for non-conformity.[2] After Erskine's death in 1696, no doubt his parishioners held in memory the influence of preaching such as his, which Thomas Boston is said to have warmly praised. Even as late as 1873 Chirnside was the only parish in Berwickshire to have a Cameronian Church and congregation. George Home himself could boast a covenanting father, Alexander Home of Kennetsidehead, who had suffered martyrdom for his religious beliefs in the year 1682. Thus, having this family tradition in a parish where he served for forty years, George Home at least outwardly must have been an enthusiastic, fanatical, and intolerant zealot, the type of Christian which David Hume came to dislike so violently.

Greig pictures the Calvinism of Hume's childhood in a very dark light and fails to see any positive contributions to the boy's development from this legalistic Presbyterianism. "We shall not go far wrong, therefore, in assuming that the sermons David Home the boy listened to (or made pretence of listening to) when he went to kirk at Chirnside, did not

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[1]Greig, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

[2]Hew Scott, op. cit., II, 34.

differ in theology or manner, though perhaps a great deal in quality, from the sermons preached by Thomas Boston in his lonely parish on the moors of Selkirkshire about the same time; or that the doctrines inculcated daily by his mother and his schoolmaster, and from time to time by George Home, his uncle, on a round of catechising, were in substance those that I have just sketched."[1] The holy Sabbath is described as "a day devoid of beauty, liberty and joy."[2] In short, this presentation of religion in Scotland leads to the conclusion that it is no wonder Hume afterwards assailed Puritan and Presbyterian enthusiasm with bitterness.

The discussion of Hume's Calvinistic environment is modified in Mossner's book. He pictures the Homes of Ninewells as enlightened political liberals "unreceptive to the religious 'enthusiasms' of the Covenanters and of the Evangelicals in general." This enlightened spirit prevailed at Chirnside as well where "the Kirk was heavily under the domination of the family. . . ."[3] Moderation was maintained here even when dour and religiously bigoted Scotsmen were putting witches to death in Sutherland and Ross as late as 1722 and 1727.

> The witch-hunt was never up in Chirnside--possibly because it could get no official sanction. . . . Whatever the state of popular superstition may actually have been, the Kirk Session Book during the ministry of the Reverend William Miller, 1698-1702, reveals that before the repeal of the Witches Act in 1736, intelligence and understanding were already exorcising superstition and bigotry.[4]

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[1] Greig, op. cit., p. 43. [2] Ibid., pp. 43-48.

[3] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 16.

Allowance is made for turbulent times at Chirnside before the somewhat enlightened and tolerant ministry of William Miller. The deposition in 1689 of the incumbent by the Privy Council for refusing to offer public prayer in behalf of William and Mary is mentioned. His successor, Henry Erskine, is pictured as "a Presbyterian of the 'true-blue' school."[1] But in so far as the Reverend George Home of Broadhaugh is concerned, Mossner concludes:

> Nothing specifically is known about the religious beliefs of this uncle of David Hume nor how far he was affected by the evangelicalism of his father. . . . Consequently nothing is known about the influence that this uncle may have exerted upon David either at home or at church . . . . As a young boy David had no prepossessions against religion and, therefore, probably no dislike of the Reverend George Home as a minister. How he fancied him as an uncle is again unknown.[2]

As for the "Scottish Sabbath" there seems to be general agreement that it was much too rigorous, depressing and gloomy, and placed severe restrictions upon an individual's personal freedom. Too often, however, this analysis has been carried to the extreme and has embraced the prejudiced view of Calvinism as a hindrance to <u>all</u> progress in intellectual, social and literary efforts. It is true that there was much to be condemned in the religious thought and practices of the early eighteenth century, especially the "popularized version of Calvin's teaching, retaining its darker features, and representing even these in a distorted and exaggerated form."[3] However, to regard the Calvinism of those days as wholly

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[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 33. [2] <u>Ibid.</u>

[3] Kemp Smith, Introduction to Hume's <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u> (2nd ed., London, 1947), p. 3.

detrimental is a false view. The darker aspects may have captured the minds of the uneducated masses (chiefly in the closing years of the seventeenth century), but there was an awakening of the intellect coming about. Men like Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith, as well as David Hume, associated with the Moderates of the Scottish Kirk and found their conversation extremely stimulating. The advancing attitude of the eighteenth century was one of critical analysis applied to all fields. It is not difficult to see how this critical mode of thinking came from the intellectualism of Scottish Calvinism. The parishioners listened with attentiveness to the minister's sermons and spent the Sunday in critical evaluation from the point of view of orthodox Calvinistic dogma. This criticism of theological thought created a habit of mind that came to be applied in all fields--philosophy, economics, politics and particularly for Hume, morals. Thus, it appears religious training contributed a great deal to the literature produced in Scotland during the golden age of letters.

By the 1720's the intellectual level of the clergy was considerably higher than it had been in the latter years of the seventeenth century. It is likely that David Hume met a number of able-minded ministers of the Kirk of Scotland. At any rate, he was not in the habit of looking down on the Scottish clergy; he had not done so in his youth and he did not do so in his maturity. In later life, he (as well as Adam Smith) had as some of his best friends and colleagues members of the clergy. Consequently, any anti-clerical spirit which may be

evinced in Hume's works should be recognized in its true light as an opposition to a specific type of clergyman--the fanatical zealot or enthusiast.

In precisely what way Hume came to be acquainted with Presbyterian enthusiasm, we have no way of determining with certainty. From the scanty evidence which is available, however, we can make a few conjectures. If the type of religion which Hume's mother and uncle advocated was not of the enthusiastic and fanatical brand, it was at least strong enough to cause David to think seriously about religious and moral questions. He would have had ample opportunity of becoming acquainted with religious thought--Calvinistic teaching, if not fanaticism and evangelicalism. Near the end of his life when visited by James Boswell, Hume stated that he was at one time religious. Boswell records the following conversation with Hume:

> I asked him if he was not religious when he was young. He said he was, and he used to read The Whole Duty of Man; that he made an abstract from the Catalogue of vices at the end of it, and examined himself by this, leaving out Murder and Theft and such vices as he had no chance of committing, having no inclination to commit them.[1]

It may have been in the library at the Ninewell's home where David first became acquainted with this book.

The Whole Duty of Man[2] was first published in 1658 and was probably written by the Royalist divine, Richard Allestree (1619-81). The teaching contained within the volume is

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[1]Boswell, Private Papers, XII, 227-228.

[2]The Whole Duty of Man (London: William Norton, 1709), was the edition consulted for use in this paper.

certainly orthodox. Yet the fanaticism we find in the sermons of Boston is omitted and the more difficult Calvinistic doctrines are given in a mild tone without departing from the essentials. The work is divided into seventeen chapters and is designed to be read one chapter every Lord's Day so that the whole book is covered thrice in the year. The author's purpose is to show the necessity of caring for the soul. The duty of man is presented according to the light of nature and the light of Scripture and is treated in reference to God, to self, and to others. The author has added a section containing "Private Devotions for several Occasions" and it is in this that we find the catalogue of vices[1] to which Hume refers, entitled: "Brief Heads of Self-Examination, especially before the Sacrament, collected out of the foregoing Treatise, concerning the breaches of our Duty." It is stated that the use of this catalogue of sins is,

> Upon days of Humiliation, especially before the Sacrament, read them consideringly over, and at evening particular ask thine own heart, 'Am I guilty of this?' And whatsoever by such Examination thou findest thy self faulty in, Confess particularly, and humbly to God, with all the heightening circumstances, which may any ways increase their guilt, and make serious resolutions against every such Sin for the future. . . .[2]

We have no way of determining what vices Hume included in the abstract by means of which he examined himself. Certain ones were excluded, because, as he said, he had no chance or inclination of committing them. At any rate, the breaches of man's duty concerning God must have greatly influenced

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[1] Ibid., pp. 412, 425. [2] Ibid., p. 425.

Hume's early thinking on religion. The following are a few of the vices listed: not believing there is a God; not believ- His Word; not believing it practically, so as to live according to our belief; not desiring to draw near to Him in His ordinances; not longing to enjoy Him in Heaven; not fearing God so as to keep from offending Him; neglecting to read the Holy Scriptures; not marking when we do read; placing religion in hearing of sermons, without practice; breaking our Vow made at baptism; by resorting to witches and conjurers, i.e., to the Devil; not worshipping God; omitting prayers, public or private, and being glad of a pretence to do so; neglecting the duty of repentance; not assigning any set or solemn times for humiliation, and confession, or too seldom. The list of vices committed in reference to ourselves and our neighbors might have served to arouse in Hume an interest in morals. We need enumerate only a few: being puffed up with high conceits of ourselves, in respect of natural parts, as beauty, wit, etc., of worldly riches and honors, of Grace; greedily seeking the praise of men; uncontentedness in our estates; greedy desires after honors and riches; making pleasure, not health, the end of eating; drunkenness; wasting the time or estate in good fellowship; using unlawful recreations; being too vehement upon lawful ones; pinching our bodies to fill our purses; being injurious to our neighbors; affrighting him from godliness, by our scoffing at it; blasting the credit of our neighbors by false witness; rash judging of him; unthankfulness to benefactors; despising our spiritual

fathers; not loving them for their work's sake; not obeying those commands of God they deliver to us; stubborn and irreverent behavior to our natural parents; unfaithfulness to a friend; denying him assistance in his needs; not giving liberally and cheerfully. We may conclude from this sketch of The Whole Duty of Man that, on the whole, it must have served admirably as an introduction to traditional religion and morality for the youthful David Hume.

Student Days at Edinburgh

During Hume's university days there was still widespread despair and gloom in Edinburgh and throughout the rest of Scotland. Trade was stagnant and the population was declining; there was little to encourage the country to initiative. This temper naturally had its effect upon the life of the Kirk, and the traditionally austere Calvinistic teaching tended to become even more gloomy and dismal. Superstition and fanaticism, thriving in such an atmosphere, made their appeal to the masses, and it was these feelings which Hume so much loathed. If Hume did not learn from his uncle the dark aspects of the teaching of Scottish Calvinism, he had ample opportunity of meeting it in many of the Edinburgh congregations. Kemp Smith suggests that,

> At the annual Communions in which the parishes of the district joined forces, he may even have listened to Thomas Boston, the author of The Fourfold State. Boston was one of the most popular preachers in the Borders, and was much in demand at these services.[1]

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[1]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 5.

The university years, when Hume was between eleven and fourteen years of age, are little known to us. David Hume did not graduate and apart from his signature in William Scot's Matriculation Book for 1722-23 there is no record of what lectures he attended. Greig makes the conjectures, based on Hume's own statement that he "passed through the ordinary course of education with success," that he took the ordinary course at college--(i) Humanity, (ii) Greek, (iii) Logic & Metaphysics, and (iv) Ethics and Natural Philosophy.[1] Even if it be true that Hume did in fact enter these studies, we are at a loss to know definitely what influence they might have had on him. Except for the names of the professors and some of the texts which they prescribed, we are without records of what the teaching was like in the University of Edinburgh between the years 1722 and 1725. Yet, we can be sure that the intellectual atmosphere prevailing at the university was one concerned with new ideas in science, philosophy and literature.

In Laurence Dundas' Humanity Class, studies included Virgil, Horace, Terence, Cicero and Tacitus with the usual Latin orations. William Scot's class had practically no effect upon the students as we learn from Hume's own confession that he learned very little Greek at this time and had to teach himself some twenty years later.[2] Alexander Grant gives us

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[1] Greig, op. cit., p. 58.

[2] Letters, I, 2. However, from the fact that in 1729 Scot transferred to the Chair of Ethics, it seems more than likely that the bent of his mind towards ethics would cause him to pass on some hints to his students. Scot had also lectured on the law of nature and nations and had edited an

little information on Colin Drummond who taught Logic and Metaphysics other than "it is probable that [he] taught . . . according to the old tradition of the College of Edinburgh, tempering Scholasticism with Ramism."[1] It seems, however, that Drummond was interested enough in the "New Philosophy" to subscribe in 1728 to Henry Pemberton's View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy and may have discussed Newton and Locke in Hume's class four years earlier. Drummond's discussions on applied logic in rhetoric and literary criticism were bound to have caught David's interest. What William Law, the professor of Ethics, advanced is even more in doubt than the teaching of the others, but he also was one of the subscribers of Pemberton's book. If Hume attended Robert Stewart's Natural Philosophy class, he must certainly have been introduced to the thought of Isaac Newton. Stewart started as a Cartesian but became a Newtonian, and in 1741 prescribed as some of his texts Newton's Of Colours and Principia and Gregory's Optics and Astronomy.[2] It is not certain that this change in his views came before the time Hume might have entered

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abridgment of Hugo Grotius' De Jure Belli ac Pacis. Suggestions from Grotius' work would have provided Hume with material for speculation. [Cf. Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 41-42.]

[1]Alexander Grant, The Story of the University of Edinburgh (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1884), II, 328.

[2]Ibid., I, 272. [Cf. Robert Henderson, "A Short Account of the University of Edinburgh, the present professors in it, and the several parts of Learning taught by them," in Scots Magazine, III, (1741), 371-2.] Henderson as Library-keeper and Secretary advertised Stewart's lectures at this time as emphasizing the new developments in physics, including optics and astronomy, from the works of Newton and his followers.

his class, but it seems likely. As Greig points out, "a man above forty does not change his mind so readily as one below."[1] Stewart by 1728 had subscribed to Pemberton's interpretation of Newton, and Hume no doubt heard from him at least the major features of the system that was to influence powerfully his own intellectual development. Newtonianism was expounded and taught by James Gregory, the Professor of Mathematics, but by 1720, due to infirmity and old age, he had to resort to substitute lectures. When he retired in 1725 Colin Maclaurin, one of the earliest and most celebrated followers of Newton, took Gregory's place. If Hume attended the mathematics class he certainly had ample opportunity of hearing the "New Philosophy."

Although we are unable to trace any direct influence on Hume's thinking during these university years, we can, nevertheless, regard this period as the time when he confirmed his interest in the literature represented by Virgil, Horace, Cicero and Tacitus. The passion for literature which was born at Ninewells was without doubt nurtured at the University. It may have been in reading Cicero that Hume first became awakened to metaphysical problems which sowed seeds of doubt in his mind.

It might be assumed that a student of the University would have an opportunity of freeing himself from the influence of Presbyterian enthusiasm now that he was no longer confined to the preaching of a parish minister and the teaching

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 59.

of a parish schoolmaster. But this certainly was not the case. Edinburgh did not differ religiously from the country parishes and the University did not limit its activities to the merely secular. The Principal was expected to supervise both the intellectual and spiritual welfare of the students. That the Town Council endeavored to see that all went well with the religious development of the University is evinced in an Act of 1723: ". . . the Town Councill appointed the professors and students in the Colledge of this city to be accomodat with seats in the Lady Yesters Church to hear the Word preached. . . ."[1] Professors of the college were required to subscribe the Confession of Faith[2] and had to be members of the National Church.[3] They were expected to look after the spiritual welfare of their students.

> The practice of living in chambers in the colleges was much encouraged by the universities, as conducing to the moral and religious nurture of youth. . . .
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> Once established in their college chambers, the students came under the vigilant care and custody of the regents. . . . At 6 a.m. all were summoned by the bell, and appeared in the common hall to answer to their names, and after prayer and religious instruction they proceeded to their several class rooms. The pietistic character of the period pervaded the colleges as well as the church, and forced religion on scholars till it begot hypocrisy, cant, or weariness. . . .
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> Before a class began its work the students took their turn to open the class with a prayer. . . . So far from Sun-

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[1]Alexander Morgan and Robert Kerr Hannay, University of Edinburgh: Charters, Statutes, and Acts of the Town Council and the Senatus, 1583-1858 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1937), p. 172.

[2]Graham, Social Life, p. 448. [Cf. Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 184.]

[3]Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 94.

> day bringing any rest and relaxation to the youths, it brought more burdens grievous to be borne. On the Sabbath morning all assembled in their respective class-rooms, and after religious exercises, clad in their scarlet gowns, they followed the principal and professors to kirk both morning and afternoon. At four o'clock the college bell was rung, and they again appeared in their several class-rooms, where they were examined regarding the discourses they had heard and the portion of theology which had been prescribed for study; they were next questioned on the Catechism, and listened to an exposition of the Confession of Faith. Thereafter they were allowed to return, weary and worn out, to their respective lodgings, their homes, or their college chambers, whence, except to hear a lecture in the college kirk from a professor, they dared not emerge; for to 'vague' in the street or garden entailed a rebuke and incurred a fine. Even in Church they sat under vigilant inspection of the regent's eye, and what they put into the plate or ladle was sharply noted, and reported by the watchful elders.[1]

Thus Graham pictures the life of an undergraduate; and although the sermons of the ministers of the Edinburgh kirks might have been better phrased and less crude than the sermons of the Reverend George Home, we may feel assured that the services David Hume attended while a student at the University were as drab and cheerless as those he sat through at Chirnside.

Greig[2] and Kemp Smith suggest that Hume may have "tasted of the experiences of conversion"[3] sometime during these adolescent years. Greig bases his argument on the statement Hume made to Boswell concerning the religion of his youth,[4] and dates this serious change of mind in 1724 or thereabouts. It is hinted that Hume accepted religion somewhat in the

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[1]Graham, Social Life, pp. 457-461.

[2]Greig, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

[3]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 6.

[4]Supra, p. 122.

spirit of his teachers, that is, in an attitude which may be regarded as a spiritual conversion. Kemp Smith refers to the evidence of some early letters which show that in his teens Hume was shy and loved solitude. He is pictured as a lad absorbed in his studies and anxious to confirm his moral character. All this, Kemp Smith contends, points to a temper that, quite conceivably, resulted in spiritual transformation. "Is it likely that a serious-minded, introspective youth, who sought to be religious and counted himself such, would altogether escape the more exciting and, as was then held, the indispensable initial experiences of the avowed believer?"[1]

Both Kemp Smith and Greig go on to argue that Hume at an early date violently reacted against Calvinistic teaching and rejected the religion he had formerly accepted. Hume is said to have felt a strong aversion to Calvinistic enthusiasm which typified for him what he meant by religion. Kemp Smith believes this aversion was "an important factor in determining the contrary character of the beliefs to which, as his philosophy matured, he definitively committed himself."[2] Greig attempts to account for certain paradoxical aspects in Hume's thinking "by means of unresolved antipathies, rooted, though perhaps not completely buried, in his past life."[3] In Greig's estimation,

> . . . the most significant events, for an understanding of the grown man, were his inconclusive struggles in

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[1]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 6.

[2]Ibid. [3]Greig, op. cit., p. 376.

> religion. These, more than ought else, fixed his "mental climate" in the middle years. And themost important fact about these struggles is their inconclusiveness; for struggles that are not concluded by a victory (no matter which way it goes) leave rancour. Hume's did. Until about the age of forty-five, his bitterness against churchmen, never mind of what sect or creed, exceeded all reasonable bounds. It expressed, not so much convictions, as his half-conscious, half-suppressed memories of all the fights that he had with pious Christians in his youth. The "religious Whigs"--these became the objects of an almost blind aversion, which informs many pages of the Essays and The Stuarts.[1]

Much of this is, of course, merely conjecture, as both commentators would very readily agree. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the above arguments are not to be denied. That Calvinistic teaching had a profound effect upon the formation of Hume's own religious opinions is not to be doubted. David was a serious-minded youth and was vitally concerned with moral and theological questions. But to say that he experienced a religious conversion seems to be a conclusion without sufficient warrant. In maturity he came to dislike violently the superstition and enthusiasm he had encountered as a boy. Yet that he experienced an intense hatred for the clergy and renounced all forms of religion in his university years or even possibly before 1744 is a presumption without adequate proof. Mossner has summed up very admirably the actual situation of Hume's early years as follows:

> . . . of David's kicking over the sabbatical traces as a boy, there is not the slightest indication. On his own word, he was religious when he was young, apparently accepting the stern Calvinistic doctrines of Original Sin, the Total Depravity of Human Nature, Predestination, and Election, without a tremor--which is only what was to be expected of a normal boy.

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[1] Ibid.

> Taking his religion unusually seriously, the young David Hume was attracted to the task of soul-searching. He went to the extent of abstracting a list of the vices Catalogued at the end of . . . The Whole Duty of Man, and of testing his character against them. . . . This, he later acknowledged, 'was strange work; for instance, to try if, notwithstanding his excelling his schoolfellows, he had no pride or vanity' . . . . Strange work it assuredly was, but that it is to be regarded as 'wrestling with sin' in the recommended manner of the Evangelicals remains dubious.
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> The boy David Hume was, it is clear, already beginning to think for himself and to deem moral issues of paramount importance. This earnest and thinking boy it was who, before his twelfth birthday, went up to Edinburgh University to complete his formal education. And there can be no doubt that his mind was so framed as to be receptive to new ideas and new influence.[1]

Evidence is lacking to warrant the view that Hume had at one time been converted but very early renounced his Christian faith and became bitterly opposed to the clergy. And while it is the purpose of this thesis to show that David Hume had a life-long interest in religious questions, it must be recognized that the situation in which he found himself was always that of a spectator rather than a participant. Hume's books on religion are written from the standpoint of the detached observer; religious experience seems to be an aspect entirely lacking in his nature. His concern with faith was merely intellectual. When he decided to study human nature, he recognized that religious belief was an element of man's experience. Consequently, he was interested in religion as an aspect of his field of study. Kemp Smith is correct in his analysis of Hume's religious sentiment:

> Religion was brought to his attention not by anything in his own personal needs or convictions, but by the prominence--

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 34.

> so surprising, as it seemed to him--with which it bulked in the lives of others, and by the strange vagaries of belief, observance, and conduct to which it gave rise. Both as a philosopher and as a historian he was constrained, ever and again, almost in spite of himself, to speculate anew upon it. It was so many-sided and so ambiguous in its manifestations, so puzzling in its lack of conformity to the other, more ordinary, aspects of human existence![1]

If Hume had really experienced conversion, he might have been able to appreciate the thoughts and actions of the zealots and enthusiasts and his dealings with them in his historical and philosophical works would no doubt have been less prejudiced. Hume's religious thoughts and comments were given, however, from outside the Christian community. He was not an orthodox Christian; his life was devoid of the faith and beliefs that are basic to Christianity. But that he was deeply concerned with religion, his attention to religious subjects proves. He tried his best to comprehend theological doctrines, but always from the standpoint of an observer. If Hume had claimed to have been a theologian, we could very likely criticize his treatises as lacking the essential insights which come only from the actual living through an event. Unless there is belief, the theologian has no object for study; the process of believing must continue even while faith is being examined. Perhaps Hume's treatment of spiritual topics can only be fully appreciated when we realize that his standpoint was that of a mere observer completely lacking in devotional experiences. He was unable to understand the meaning of Christian fellowship with God, and the lack of belief in his own life limited his

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[1]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 1.

appreciation of the religious experiences of others.

The fact that Hume was not a Christian in no wise warrants the conclusion that he was an atheist or even anti-religious. In fact he claimed the very opposite. The statements made to Boswell that "he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke" and that "the Morality of every Religion was bad, and, . . . when he heard a man was religious, he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious,"[1] may be taken as referring to superstition, fanaticism and Calvinistic enthusiasm. David Hume, knowing the type of religious man Boswell was, would take great pleasure in speaking thus. But in his more serious moments, Hume presented himself as a man concerned with reaching truth in the religious sphere of human nature. It may be a deficiency in his investigation that he did not go to a theologian or believer for the material necessary to explain religious experience in men, since he himself did not have such a faith; but Hume did at least attempt to give an explanation--one based on an analysis of human nature. He believed that religion as an aspect of man's experience could be studied by means of the experimental methods which were proving to be successful in the study of the natural sciences. It is not my purpose to criticize the legitimacy of such an endeavor but rather to emphasize what it was Hume intended in his works on religion.

Any nominal assent Hume may have at one time given to

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[1]Boswell, Private Papers, XII, 227-228.

beliefs taught in his home was probably given up while he was at college or shortly thereafter. He stated that after reading Locke and Clarke he abandoned his religious views, and we have no reason to doubt that he very early disapproved of the enthusiastic and zealous faith of eighteenth century Presbyterianism. Hume had undoubtedly heard lectures on both these philosophers at college; the actual reading of their books may not have taken place until later. Likely enough, he had been influenced sufficiently by his readings in moral philosophy to become irked by the air of piety in the college classes and the requirement of praying before learning. He saw too much hypocrisy in it all to accept the common religious view.

Although Locke and Clarke had a vast importance for Hume as a youth, it is not likely that they alone turned him away from Christian enthusiasm. He had doubtlessly read other books which counted too; and events had been taking place around him the effects of which were afterwards forgotten or minimized. Change was in the air, and clubs and societies sprang up for the purpose of discussing such works as those of Locke, Clarke, Butler, and Berkeley.[1] One such group was called the Rankenian Club of which the mathematician Colin Maclaurin was a leading member. Greig states that "the existence of discussion clubs such as the Rankenian, and others less public and perhaps more disreputable, very soon excited

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[1]See Ramsay of Ochtertyre, op. cit., I, 195-196.

the suspicions of the godly."[1] Hume presumably was influenced by these clubs and the changing spirit of his age.

> David Home, though singular in his precocity and in the fearlessness with which he followed up his own reasoning wherever it might take him, was only one out of many young Scotsmen who were now examining the basis of their fathers' faith, and were tending, under influences mainly English in their origin, towards an attitude of mind less fanatical, less narrow, more humane and humanistic, than had been the rule in Scotland since the days of John Knox.[2]

We may be sure that the strong literary bent of the Edinburgh clubs strengthened Hume's native passion for literature and their philosophical interest in the "New Philosophy" no doubt had an influence in centering his attention in Newton, Locke, Clarke, Butler, Berkeley, and perhaps Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Hutcheson.

Literary Ambition

In the story of "My Own Life" Hume states that he very early developed a passion for literature and this became the ruling passion of his life. His family desired him to enter the legal profession but his mind was bent rather to "the pursuits of Philosophy and general Learning; and while they fancyed I was poring over Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the Authors I was secretly devouring."[3] Hume soon gave up the study of law and turned to a whole-hearted search of the writings of philosophers. In a letter to his friend Michael Ramsay written in 1727, Hume stated that he was

> . . . entirely confind to my self & Library for Diversion, . . . & indeed to me they are not a small one; for I take

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 73. [2]Ibid., p. 76. [3]Letters, I, 1.

> no more of them than I please, for I hate task-reading, & I diversify them at my Pleasure; sometimes a Philosopher, sometimes a Poet; . . . indeed this pastoral & Saturnian happyness I have in a great measure come at, just now; I live like a King pretty much to my self; . . . This Greatness and Elevation of Soul is to be found only in Study & Contemplation, . . . You must allow [me] to talk thus like a Philosopher; tis a subject I think much on & could talk all day long of. . . .[1]

Hume by this time had completed his university courses and was engaged in independent study; he was then in his sixteenth year. The chief interest of his mind was philosophy, which he regarded as a part of literature. To be a philosopher, then, was to be a man of letters. Hume was spending his time and energy in the company of Cicero, Virgil, Milton, Longinus, Locke, Clarke and Bayle. Informing Ramsay that he was reading "sometimes a philosopher, sometimes a Poet," Hume intimated that he might have a contribution of his own to make in the realm of philosophy. But he inquired:

> Would you have me send in my loose, uncorrect thoughts? Were such worth the transcribing? All the progress that I made is but drawing the outlines, in loose bits of Paper; here a hint of a passion, there a Phenomenon in the mind accounted for, in another the alteration of these accounts; sometimes a remark upon an Author I have been reading, And none of them worth to any Body & I believe scarce to my self.[2]

It is important to know how Hume became interested in poets, orators, philosophers and critics and how these kindled and inflamed in him an entirely new ambition--literary fame, his "ruling passion." If we can discover the motives behind his study in this period of life, it may be possible to see definitely what problem was actually uppermost in his mind--what it was he had in view in his own works. What was the

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[1] Letters, I, 9-10. [2] Letters, I, 9.

scheme or guiding purpose which gave direction to Hume's arguments? What determined his choice of topics for examination? These are, of course, fundamental questions, and the answers which are given to them will determine the interpretation of Hume's philosophy and the regard given him in the history of philosophy.

There are two letters written by Hume--one to Gilbert Elliot in 1751; the other to a Scottish physician, thought by Hill Burton to have been Dr. George Cheyne[1]--which serve to throw valuable light on this early period of his interest in philosophical problems. Let us examine first the letter to Elliot. Hume was writing concerning the Dialogues and asked for suggestions as to how he might strengthen the argument of Cleanthes, the philosophical theist. He indicated that any propensity toward Philo the sceptic had entered against his will. The letter continues:

> . . . tis not long ago that I burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that head. It begun with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion: Doubts stole in, dissipated, return'd, were again dissipated, return'd again; and it was a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination, perhaps against Reason.[2]

When these statements are compared with those in the

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[1]Mossner identifies the physician as Dr. John Arbuthnot and discredits Cheyne on the grounds that he was not in London at the time and because he would have taken offense at Hume's remarks on philosophy and religion. [Cf. Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 84; Mossner, "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734: The Biographical Significance," Huntington Library Quarterly, VII, (1944), 135-52; cf. Hill Burton, op. cit., I, 42-45.]

[2]Letters, I, 154.

letter to the physician, the picture of Hume's youthful questionings begins to become significant. He was seeking advice concerning the condition of his health, and believed a kind of story of his life would help the physician to make a proper diagnosis of the situation. The personal history begins:

> You must know then that from my earliest Infancy, I found always a strong Inclination to Books & Letters. As our College Education in Scotland, extending little further than the Languages, ends commonly when we are about 14 or 15 Years of Age, I was after that left to my own Choice in my Reading, & found it encline me almost equally to Books of Reasoning & Philosophy, & to Poetry & the polite Authors. Every one, who is acquainted either with the Philosophers or Critics, knows that there is nothing yet established in either of these two Sciences, & that they contain little more than endless Disputes, even in the most fundamental Articles. Upon Examination of these, I found a certain Boldness of Temper, growing in me, which was not enclin'd to submit to any Authority in these Subjects, but led me to seek out some new Medium, by which Truth might be establisht. After much Study, & Reflection on this, at last, when I was about 18 Years of Age, there seem'd to be open'd up to me a new Scene of Thought, which transported me beyond Measure, & made me, with an Ardor natural to young men, throw up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it. . . . I cou'd think of no other way of pushing my Fortune in the World, but that of a Scholar & Philosopher. I was infinitely happy in this Course of Life for some Months; till at last, about the beginning of Sept 1729, all my Ardor seem'd in a moment to be extinguisht & I cou'd no longer raise my Mind to that pitch, which formerly gave me such excessive Pleasure. . . .
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> There was another particular, which contributed more than any thing, to waste my Spirits & bring on me this Distemper, which was, that having read many Books of Morality, such as Cicero, Seneca & Plutarch, & being smit with their beautiful Representations of Virtue & Philosophy, I undertook the Improvement of my Temper & Will, along with my Reason and Understanding. I was continually fortifying myself with Reflections against Death & Poverty, & Shame, & Pain, & all the other Calamities of Life.[1]

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[1] Letters, I, 13-14.

Hume then told about his physical condition, stating that he had suffered from scurvy spots on his fingers and a wateriness in his mouth. Under medical advice and regimen, his health sufficiently improved to allow him to study in moderation.

> I now began to take some Indulgence to myself; studied moderately, & only when I found my Spirits at their highest Pitch, leaving off before I was weary, & trifling away the rest of my Time in the best manner I could.[1]

There follows, in quite some detail, remarks about the changes in Hume's appetite and general appearance. He was no longer tall and lean but had become sturdy, robust and healthful looking with a ruddy complexion and cheerful countenance. The letter continues:

> Thus I have given you a full account of the Condition of my Body, & . . . shall explain to you how my Mind stood all this time, which on every Occasion, especially in this Distemper, have a very near Connexion together. Having now Time & Leizure to cool my inflam'd Imaginations, I began to consider seriously, how I shou'd proceed in my Philosophical Enquiries. I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study, & the Source from which I wou'd derive every Truth in Criticism as well as Morality. I believe 'tis a certain Fact that most of the Philosophers who have gone before us, have been overthrown by the Greatness of their Genius, & that little more is requir'd to make a man succeed in this Study than to throw off all Prejudices either for his own Opinions or for this of others. At least this is all I have to depend on for the Truth of my Reasonings, which I have multiply'd to such a degree, that within these three Years, I find I have scribled many a Quire of Paper, in which there is nothing

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[1] Letters, I, 14-15.

> contain'd but my own Inventions. This with the Reading most of the celebrated Books in Latin, French & English, & acquiring the Italian, you may think a sufficient Business for one in perfect Health; & so it wou'd, had it been done to any Purpose: But my Disease was a cruel Incumbrance on me. I found that I was not able to follow out any Train of Thought, by one continued Stretch of View, but by repeated Interruptions, & by refreshing my Eye from Time to Time upon other Objects. Yet with this Inconvenience I have collected the rude Materials for many Volumes; but in reducing these to Words, when one must bring the Idea he comprehended in gross, nearer to him, so as to contemplate its minutest Parts, & keep it steddily in his Eye, so as to copy these Parts in Order, this I found impracticable for me, nor were my Spirits equal to so severe an Employment. Here lay my greatest Calamity. I had no Hopes of delivering my Opinions with such Elegance & Neatness, as to draw to me the Attention of the World, & I wou'd rather live & dye in Obscurity than produce them maim'd & imperfect.
>
> Such a miserable Disappointment I scarce ever remember to have heard of. The small Distance betwixt me & perfect Health makes me the more uneasy in my present Situation. Tis a Weakness rather than a Lowness of Spirits which troubles me, & there seems to be as great a Difference betwixt my Distemper & common Vapors, as betwixt Vapors & Madness.
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> I have notic'd in the Writings of the French Mysticks, & in those of our Fanatics here, that, when they give a History of the Situation of their Souls, they mention a Coldness & Desertion of the Spirit, which frequently returns, & some of them, at the beginning, have been tormented with it many Years. As this kind of Devotion depends entirely on the Force of Passion, & consequently of the Animal Spirits, I have often thought that their Case & mine were pretty parralel, & that their rapturous Admirations might discompose the Fabric of the Nerves & Brain, as much as profound Reflections, & that warmth or Enthusiasm which is inseperable from them.[1]

In concluding, Hume informed the Doctor that he had decided to enter business as a merchant in order to rid himself of "this distemper." He was on his way to Bristol and took this opportunity to seek the physician's advice. Hume enquires what he may hope for in the way of recovery, whether he must wait long for it, and whether his recovery will ever

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[1] Letters, I, 16-17.

be perfect and his spirits regain their former spring and vigor, "so as to endure the Fatigue of deep and abstruse thinking."

From these letters we may gain insights into the early progress of Hume's thought. He told Elliot that questions concerning religion arose in his mind before he was twenty and that he had written several pages in a manuscript book on the subject. The progress of his thought had been one of anxiously searching for arguments to substantiate the common beliefs in a Deity and of raising doubts concerning such beliefs. Hume was inclined to the common opinion, but his restless mind imagined various possibilities; consequently, he could not confirm himself in the Christian faith. Being tossed between doubt and inclination to assent, he could for a time only make a record of these conflicting attitudes in his notes. He saw some validity and usefulness in religious beliefs, otherwise we may be sure that he would have entirely given up such questions and turned his attention to other problems. The decision to study philosophy was made by Hume about the time of his eighteenth year. It seems, then, that his introduction into philosophical thought as a career came as the result of an interest in the religious beliefs of his day.

Hume said that he burned the manuscript containing his notes on the progress of his thinking in the religious sphere. Nevertheless, he seems to have overlooked a few

pages on which are recorded some of his speculations.[1] Although it is difficult to determine the exact date of their composition,[2] these notes may be regarded as indicating some of Hume's early thoughts and also as clearly reflecting his wide reading. Although these memoranda do not provide us with a complete outline of Hume's intellectual development in this crucial period, they are useful in leading us to a fuller understanding of the Treatise and its author. Most of the reading and thinking embodied in the Treatise goes back to the years 1729-1734; consequently, any evidence that may relate to this time of creation should not be overlooked. It is indeed unfortunate that the most important manuscript collections on the subject of religious scepticism[3] were

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[1]These notes were printed in part by Burton, op. cit., I, 95-96; 124-135. They are to be found in the Calendar of Hume MSS in the possession of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Edinburgh: 1932), compiled by J.Y.T.Greig and Harold Beyon, IX, 14. For use in this thesis I consulted the edition by Mossner, "Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: the Complete Text," in Journal of the History of Ideas, IX, (1948), 492-518.

[2]Burton dates the bulk of the notes subsequent to the composition of the Treatise and prior to the publication of the first volume of the Essays (i.e., between 1739-1741). Only the items entitled "Natural Philosophy" are regarded as preceding the year 1739. [Burton, op. cit., I, 95-96; 124-135.] Kemp Smith mentions watermarks of 1734, 1739 and 1743 on the sheets and apparently agrees with Burton's dates. [Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 35n3.] Hendel also agrees with this dating. [Hendel, op. cit., p. 28ff.] Mossner, on the other hand, believes Burton's dating is late. From a review of certain pertinent facts in Hume's letters, Mossner arrives at the following dates: The section of "Natural Philosophy" may have been begun as early as 1729 and completed in 1734; the section on "Philosophy" belongs to the years 1730-34; the section on miscellaneous subjects is the latest and is dated between 1737-40. [Mossner, "Hume's Early Memoranda," pp. 493-495.]

[3]". . . in which there is nothing contain'd but my own Inventions." [Letters, I, 16.]

destroyed by Hume in 1751 and we now have only a few surviving sheets of notes on his reading.[1]

The extant memoranda consist of notes of Hume's ideas and comments on his studies classified under the subjects of "Natural Philosophy," "Philosophy" and miscellaneous topics (the last section lacking a title in the manuscript). Many of these ideas turned up later chiefly in the "Natural History of Religion" and the essay "On the Populousness of Ancient Nations," while some others appeared in Essays, Moral and Political, published in 1741. A few of the references in the "Philosophy" section were used in the Treatise. The largest section, consisting of twenty of a total of twenty-six sheets, deals with a variety of subjects but is of relatively minor importance in so far as providing information about Hume's own religious views. There are a few notes which refer to the following religious topics: the doctrine of the Trinity; opinions concerning the origin of the world; design and Deity; the powers of the priests and clergy. Quite a number of references are recorded concerning the religious practices and beliefs of the ancient world. But except for indicating that Hume had an interest in religious topics, the "miscellaneous" section of the memoranda does not furnish any definite data for our study.

The section entitled "Philosophy," however, does provide some insights into Hume's speculative religious thought.

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[1]". . . most of the celebrated Books in Latin, French, & English, & the Italian. . . ." [Letters, I, 16.]

Thirty-five of the forty notes in this section deal with religious questions; at least sixteen references are from the French sceptic, Bayle. Besides indicating a vital interest in theological problems, these notes suggest that the annotator was still in the developmental stage of his thought, possibly between the years 1730-1734. The memoranda on philosophy, then, may constitute part of the "new scene of thought" which opened to Hume in 1729. One of the chief topics in these notes is the Deity; the proofs for God's existence were causing considerable concern in Hume's mind. From Bayle and Cudworth he was able to acquaint himself with the various atheistic discussions. And these arguments no doubt led to questions concerning the origin of the world and subsequently to one of the chief problems in philosophy for Hume--the explanation of order in the universe.

The traditional theological view in Hume's day stated that the arrangement which Nature appears to have in all its parts was given by God. The Cartesians, arguing from design, conceived God as a Being whose existence is infinite, necessary, and real--a Being greater than Nature. Hume was not convinced by any of these arguments but rather tended to the position of Strato. Stratonican atheism regarded matter as ordered from the beginning. There is as much order and necessity as the theist claims without searching for a Providence to shape and direct Nature. It would be unnecessary, then, to go beyond Nature; reason requires simply an affirmation of order as the essential character of the events of the natural world. If

Nature is sufficient in itself, then there is no need to search for a significance behind things as they appear. The memoranda notes disclose that Strato's naturalism exerted a powerful force in raising doubts in Hume's mind. He was unable to find enduring satisfaction in the attempts of philosophers and theologians to establish the existence of God by means of rational proofs. Thus, his restless mind, while attempting to establish the common religious opinion, found itself drawn towards sceptical doubts. During this period of personal concern over the religious views of the world, Hume was reading Bayle, and it may have been through Bayle's articles in the Dictionary that he first became acquainted with Strato's naturalism.

Other of the memoranda notes deal primarily with the human side of religion and treat such topics as man's sin and punishment, God and the origin of sin, vice and virtue in religion, the various kinds and causes of ill in the world, the eternity of the soul and its pleasure in Heaven, liberty and necessity, divine and human reason contrasted, the practice of observances as necessary to a vigorous religion, and the strictness of priests in enforcing these rather than moral duties. To sum up, then, we can be sure that David Hume was very much concerned with the question of religious experience and was attempting to arrive at some personal conclusions on this vital part of human life. In clarifying his own thoughts he scribbled "many a quire of paper," some of which have fortunately been preserved for posterity.

Referring once again to the letter to the physician, let us emphasize that Hume likened his state of mind to that of the French mystics or the fanatics of Britain. His experience had been one of doubting the findings of philosophers and critics; their sciences seemed to contain nothing but personal disputes even in fundamental articles. The direction of his thought was away from fanciful constructions without a basis in experience. While seeking some new way to truth, Hume speaks of a "new scene of thought" which dawned upon him and "filled him with joy." He was soon to recognize the role played by human nature in both moral and natural philosophy. Yet, he lost sight of his vision and despair took the place of spiritual exaltation. He felt he had made a discovery; but his mind, unable to comprehend the full significance of the vision, became exhausted.

There appears to have been two distinct periods in the development of Hume's thought. In the first, he was concerned with the fundamental questions which seemed to cause so much dispute among philosophers. Since they were unable to come to any agreement, Hume decided to examine for himself in the hope of finding some certainties or at least a method of arriving at truth. Actuated by a desire for certainty, he began to study seriously those matters which had a bearing upon human nature. His attitude was one of self-examination and optimism regarding man's ability to discover something about himself. In the spring of 1729 after spending three arduous years in study and reflection, Hume believed a new

medium of truth had been opened to him. In the second period, he engaged himself in working out the details of this new approach to philosophy. His reading and thinking were no longer desultory, and details began to fall into place as a system started to emerge. The contribution which he intended to make concerned an analysis of man's nature.

Hume's mind was made up once and for all--he would be a man of letters, "a Scholar & Philosopher." But this involved toil; and that he might succeed in the struggle to keep his mind constantly employed, Hume placed himself under a Stoic discipline of self-mastery suggested to him by the books of Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. At first he met with a fair amount of success. The program which he set for himself was an extensive investigation into human nature while avoiding the prejudices of one's own opinions or those of others. He was convinced that most of the errors in philosophy arose from the fact that imagination determined men's thoughts much more than they suspected. In order to reach truth, Hume believed it was necessary to explore the various aspects of human experience; upon human nature "every moral conclusion must depend." He had discovered many interesting things and had written several quires of paper containing his ideas; but, due to physical and mental fatigue, he was unable to express his opinions in a form capable of conveying his thoughts to the public. All attempts to bring his thoughts to clear expression upon paper seemed to fail. Here was a calamity; he believed he had something valuable to say, yet

he could not say it with exactitude. For Hume, one of the primary requisites of a thinker with original thoughts was the presentation of these thoughts so that others could understand them. His literary taste led him to insist upon a certain standard of arrangement and presentation. Finding that he was unable to meet this standard of elegance, Hume determined not to submit his discoveries in an imperfect form--he felt he would rather live and die in obscurity than produce his ideas "maimed and imperfect." Hume the artist overruled Hume the philosopher. Not abandoning hope that someday he might be able to present his opinions in an acceptable form, Hume sought medical aid in the hope of regaining the vigor necessary for "the Fatigue of deep and abstruse thinking."

It is possible that Hume's break in body and mind had an intimate connection with his departure from the Presbyterian religion of his home. There is no evidence, however, to support the often made assumption that Hume turned to a religious scepticism at an early age or without emotional struggle. Greig makes some not altogether unfounded conjectures concerning Hume's troubles in this period.[1] Regarding Hume's disturbance as emotional rather than intellectual, Greig says,

> . . . no boy, however controlled and independent in spirit, can break away without severe emotional disturbances from the religion that his family, his friends, and almost all the world around him are committed to. It is not at all remarkable that David suffered from 'desertion of the spirit' in the years following his great discovery of 1729; on the contrary, it would have been remarkable, and indeed much to be regretted, if he hadn't.[2]

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[1]Greig, op. cit., pp. 80-83. [2]Ibid., p. 80.

Hume's adventures and spiritual rebellion in the years 1725-29 did not meet with adequate expression, for he was living in conditions which forced him in self-defence to repress his feelings--his family's beliefs, the Kirk, the bigotry and narrow-mindedness of the country in general. In the years immediately succeeding he found a vent for his thoughts and regained his equilibrium "except in one particular: he could never think or write coolly and without prejudice about religious zealots."[1] Greig attempts to explain this unreasoned disapproval of the views and conduct of Presbyterian and Puritan zealots. He sees bias and injustice in Hume's treatment of religious and ecclesiastical topics in the Essays, the History and some other works; his writing is not at all sober but betrays animus and sarcasm.[2]

Greig believes the instances of anti-clerical and anti-Christian bias were due to the fact that Hume "carried forward into later life an unresolved hostility to Christian ministers and their associates; hostility acquired between 1725 and 1734, and probably before 1729--a kind of prejudice, emotional and in the main unconscious, a blind spot, or what in psycho-analytic jargon we should call a complex."[3] If Hume had back-slidden from the faith at this time as it

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[1] Ibid., p. 81.

[2] The earliest trace of such feelings appeared in a letter Hume wrote September 12, 1734 from Rheims to his friend Michael Ramsay. "Devotees feel their Devotion encrease by the Observance of trivial Superstition, as Sprinkling, Kneeling, Crossing &c, ..." [Letters, I, 21.]

[3] Greig, op. cit., pp. 81, 82.

appears he did, he would have been subjected to reprobations, threats, and bulling from his uncle, George Home, and from nearly every minister who discovered how he stood. These exhortations, denunciations, and wrathful admonitions would explain how Hume's prejudices grew and hardened. The mocking irony of his works was a result of his inability to free himself from a Calvinistic dominion over his "emotions, habits and unconscious attitudes of mind"; he rejected "Calvinism Calvinistically."[1]

> The traces of Hume's origin and of his first 'enthusiastic rebellion'--for that is what it was, although against 'enthusiasts'--were still apparent when he reached middle age. His irony, directed at the zealots, priests, and ministers, 'enthusiasts' and superstitioners, appeared very cool and quiet. But it tore; there were claws concealed in it.[2]

Greig concludes, "this at least is certain: David Hume the man did not always realize the full force of his attacks on Christians, and when these retaliated on him, he was often taken by surprise. A fully conscious prejudice is not a prejudice in any real sense."[3] What has been stated by Greig is admittedly only guesswork; but, nevertheless, it seems to provide at least a partial explanation for the emotional resentment perceptible in many of Hume's references to religion.

Mossner agrees that Hume finally gave up his early religious beliefs about the year 1729 but contends that "the process was one of rational education."[4] Hume slowly and reluctantly gave up his religion against his will because logic

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[1]Ibid., p. 82. [2]Ibid., p. 83. [3]Ibid., p. 82.

[4]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 64.

required it. Hume, agreeing with Butler and Hutcheson, regarded the a priori argument of Clarke as having no validity. But doubts began to steal into his mind concerning "the argument from probability based on the empirical philosophy of Locke and Newton," even though this argument "always remained for Hume the only philosophical argument concerning religion worthy of serious consideration."[1] The letter to Gilbert Elliot[2] is cited as evidence that Hume realized that the sceptical side of the Dialogues of Natural Religion stood up well enough but that the empirical argument needed to be strengthened. But an even more important indication is "that the youthful Hume relinquished his religious beliefs gradually over the course of years rather than immediately upon reading Locke and Clarke. And it is also clear that those religious beliefs were relinquished under philosophical pressure--that Hume reasoned himself out of religion."[3] A change in ethical standards is regarded as having had a major part in bringing about this "reverse-conversion" as Mossner calls it. Hume came to evaluate his moral fibre by reference to the pagan Cicero's Offices rather than the pietist Whole Duty of Man.[4]

What are we to conclude from these two opposing arguments? The evidence from Hume's early letters seems to uphold the view that he reasoned himself out of the beliefs of a strict Calvinistic faith. He no longer could think of

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[1] Ibid. [2] See supra, p. 139.

[3] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 64.

[4] See Letter to Francis Hutcheson, Letters, I, 34.

placing any personal belief in revealed theology or a rational system that attempted to bring in the supernatural although he still allowed for the possible validity of such belief. Hume was opposed to religion being grounded in reason. But he seemed still to regard his position as being orthodox (as we shall see later in reference to his bid for the Chair of Moral Philosophy in 1744). He continued to be interested in religious questions although his life was seemingly devoid of any personal devotion. And what he had to say about natural religion was, as far as he could discover, in no way contradictory to orthodoxy. Hume evidently considered his philosophy as opposed to atheism and deism; and that, if it added nothing to true religion, at least it took nothing away from a religion based on faith.

Resumé

In the previous analysis we found that David Hume had an early introduction into religious thought. He was brought up in a deeply religious home and received his earliest intellectual training from his mother, a pious Christian. In attendance at the parish school and the services of the Chirnside Church where his uncle was minister, Hume became acquainted with religious ideas and Presbyterianism; and although he remained nominally a member of the Church, he later repudiated strict Calvinism and came to think of religion in terms of those beliefs he had known as a youth. During his university days, Hume was still under the influence of the Church of Scotland, and it is likely that the religious influences in

Edinburgh differed very little from those encountered in Chirnside. Thus, in the home, at the school and kirk of Chirnside, and even in the University, Hume was confronted with religious thought which certainly must have influenced him profoundly.

With this background as preparation for an entry into a career, Hume found himself drawn to literature. He began to read philosophy, all the time attempting to establish the common opinions of religion and to arrive at fundamental truth. The evidence derived from Hume's letters leads us to conclude that he entered the field of philosophy by means of questioning the religious beliefs of his day. His first philosophical interest seems to have been in classical ethics and quite possibly in the questions raised in the Deistic controversy which was raging at the time. This was the way things stood in 1734 when Hume was in his twenty-third year. In the next chapter we shall consider the development of his new scheme of thought as it came to be expressed in the Treatise and the Essays.

CHAPTER IV

HUME'S FIRST LITERARY PRODUCTIONS, 1734-1745

Introduction

In 1734 Hume journeyed to Bristol to enter a merchant's life. He made this decision in the hope of recovering his health so that he could resume and continue his studies more effectually. In his autobiography he states that this business was totally unsuitable to him and that he went to France "with a View of prosecuting my Studies in a Country Retreat; and I there laid that Plan of Life, which I have steddily and successfully pursued: I resolved to make a very rigid Frugality supply my Deficiency of Fortune, to maintain unimpaired my Independency, and to regard every object contemptible, except the Improvement of my Talents in Literature."[1]

For some time Hume found himself completely at a loss to express his thoughts on the fundamental articles of philosophy and criticism which had been the subject of his enquiry. Articles of philosophy were in his day those on which the truths of natural religion, as distinguished from revealed religion, were made to rest. And as these articles were more important than those of criticism, he planned to deal with the latter only after the former had been settled.

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[1] Letters, I, 2.

Hume believed he had found the new medium by which he could establish truth and he desired to put his discovery in writing in order to convey it to the world. He thought a stay in France would perhaps enable him to present his ideas in an acceptable literary form. Therefore, he secluded himself in a small Jesuit College at La Flèche and began to study and write in his chosen field of letters and philosophy. He settled down to compose the book that had been germinating in his mind for a number of years.

The New Scheme of Thought

It is not certain what Hume meant by the new scheme of thought which he felt he had reached. Most commentators assume that he was referring to the theory of causation. C. W. Hendel, for instance, claims,

> . . . the initial discovery that filled Hume with such transports of joy and opened a whole new prospect to him was the fact that man is merely presuming whenever he uses the maxim of cause and effect. When Hume gained this great insight, he turned his thought to study the nature of man with all its presumptuous impulses.[1]

Greig has this to say concerning the new method of thought:

> [Hume] is talking of the theory of causation; he has discovered, for the first time, what he afterwards maintains in all his writings, that the supposed necessary connection between a cause and its effect lies, not in the things themselves, but in the mind observing them. He has thus gained a wholly new direction for his speculations.[2]

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[1]Hendel, op. cit., p. 25. Hendel paints an imaginary portrait of how Hume came to ask the significant question, "Why is a Cause Always Necessary?" and contends that Hume was wrestling earnestly with the arguments to confirm, in his own mind, the "common opinion" of the existence of a personal God. [Ibid., pp. 57-62.] See Supra, pp. 40ff.

[2]Greig, op. cit., p. 78.

Kemp Smith takes a similar view.[1] In dealing with the question of the primary sources of Hume's teaching, he argues for the thesis that it was under the direct influence of Francis Hutcheson that Hume was led to recognize that judgments of moral approval and disapproval, and in fact judgments of value of whatever type, are based not on rational insight or evidence but solely on feeling. What opened up to him the "new scene of thought" and gave birth in due course to the Treatise was the discovery that this point of view could be carried over into the theoretical sphere, and could there be employed in solving several of the problems which Locke and Berkeley had been unable to answer satisfactorily. Kemp Smith contends:

> If knowledge be strictly limited to those relations which are derived from the contemplation of ideas, and if all other judgments (those concerning matters of fact and existence) be taken out of the field of knowledge, and treated as judgments not of knowledge but of belief; and if further it can be shown that belief, as thus distinguished from knowledge, rests always on feeling, and never in ultimate analysis on insight or evidence, the principle illustrated in morals will be strengthened and confirmed by proof of its equal applicability in these other fields. If this thesis be correct, Sections 1 to 6 of Book I of the Treatise are of an introductory nature, and their argument is predetermined by purposes which Hume has in view, but which are not there disclosed . . . . The opening sections of the Treatise . . . while essential, are of a preliminary character; when taken by themselves they give a very misleading impression, alike in regard to Hume's ultimate purposes and in regard to the bearing of the conclusions to which they more immediately lead.[2]

The topics occupying Hume's attention during his visit to France constituted the subject matter of the Treatise of

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[1]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, p. 13.

[2]Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Human Nature. In this book we have his unique contribution to philosophy which was "the extension of sentiment or feeling beyond ethics and aesthetics (to which it was limited by Hutcheson) to include the entire realm of belief covering all relations of matter-of-fact."[1] All judgments upon truth, beauty, and conduct depend upon the nature of man; without knowledge of human nature there would never be any true understanding or happiness. Hume considered that he had made an advance towards such fundamental knowledge--a science of man.

Hume believed he had made a discovery of momentous import in his definition of belief as "A lively idea related to or associated with a present impression." In the "Appendix" he states: "This operation of the mind, which forms the belief of any matter of fact, seems hitherto to have been one of the greatest mysteries of philosophy; tho' no one has so much as suspected that there was any difficulty in explaining it."[2] The chief application of this discovery in the Treatise was to the principle of cause and effect.[3] It was this body of truth which he feared would come into the world "maimed and imperfect" unless he could regain his health. Nevertheless, he published the Treatise, choosing to risk its imperfections

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 76-77.

[2]T, 96; 628.

[3]When Hume composed An Abstract of a Book lately Published Entituled. A Treatise of Human Nature, &c, he sought to illustrate and explain further "The Chief Argument of that Book"; this argument was clearly centered upon the analysis of cause and effect. See An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature, 1740: A Pamphlet hitherto unknown by David Hume, reprinted with an introduction by J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1938).

rather than to live and die without even attempting to convey his discovery to mankind.

We have already noted the intense excitement which Hume experienced at his discovery concerning the nature of causation. He did not regard this as a mere metaphysical notion but as affecting the very foundation of knowledge and having the greatest of all possible practical consequences. Causation as the basis of moral philosophy as well as natural philosophy (that is, all matter of fact), meant that these enquiries were all grounded in belief. Consequently, the certainty of knowledge upon which philosophy had prided itself became as nothing--a matter of fact could never have absolute certainty. But in the "Introduction" to the Treatise, Hume endeavored to indicate that there was a constructive element in his thoughts as well as a criticism of the old and outworn concepts of previous philosophy:

> There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.[1]

The early reflections and studies which had led Hume to his momentous discovery are not explicitly mentioned by him. The Treatise does not tell us how he actually came to ask its chief questions--they are simply proposed and discussed. Hume does not record the thoughts which led him to this new philosophy. The lack of such an introduction on his

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[1]T, xx.

part may partially explain why his contemporaries were unable to see what he really meant by his statements. It may also be that if we ever hope to grasp fully his intentions and the rationale of his philosophy, we will be forced to discover something of these early thoughts as nearly as we possibly can. Kemp Smith contends that this is the case. He has done much to bring about a new interpretation based on an examination of Hume's entrance into the field of philosophy.[1] There are indications, as we have already noted, that Hume was concerned with questions about religion when he became interested in philosophical works. He was examining the "fundamental articles" which had been endlessly in dispute, and studying how he might by a new means establish truth in the fields of literary criticism and philosophy. Now we shall consider the possible origins of Hume's new scheme of thought in order to see what light they might shed on his attitude towards religion.

Sources for Hume's Ideas

In pointing out some of the more important authors which Hume dealt with and was influenced by during the period of the creation of the Treatise, Mossner stresses the danger of looking for any one unique source.[2] Hume's earliest extant letter indicates that he was reading books sent to him

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[1]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume.

[2]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 78-79. B. M. Laing pointed out in his book that Hume was influenced by writers other than Locke and Berkeley. [B. M. Laing, David Hume (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1932), p. 69.]

at Ninewells from Edinburgh.[1] While his interest in philosophy was first aroused by problems of theology and works in classical ethics, he soon turned to general philosophical writings. Not only was he studying the ancient philosophers but also Bayle, Cudworth, Duvos, Fénelon, and King.[2] In a letter written about 1730 Hume refers to the books of two modern French historians.[3] He speaks of reading at this time most of the celebrated books in Latin, French, English and Italian.[4] The common assumption that Hume's earliest interest was primarily in the epistemology of Locke and Berkeley is without support. From the Treatise we can see that Hume's reading of modern philosophy was wide;[5] he read as we might expect a man to do who was devoting himself to philosophy and polite literature.

Bayle was consulted by Hume as early as 1732[6] and no doubt furnished him with much of the sceptical reasoning expressed in the Treatise. It is difficult to know what he was studying in Bayle's collections, but it seems likely the Dictionnaire historique et critique (1698) and Oeuvres diverses (1727-1731) were used by Hume.[7] In the Treatise there are

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[1] Letters, I, 9.

[2] The evidence for these sources is found in Hume's manuscript memoranda. See Mossner, "Hume's Early Memoranda," pp. 500-504.

[3] Letters, II, 337. [4] Letters, I, 16.

[5] Hendel discusses the influence of Leibniz on Hume. [Hendel, op. cit., pp. 139-145.]

[6] Letters, I, 12.

[7] For a further discussion of Bayle's influence on Hume,

frequent references of the kind common in Bayle's dictionary such as "materialistic," "modern metaphysics," "philosophers of the schools," "academic sceptics," "Pyrrhonians," and the reader's understanding of these terms is taken for granted. The most interesting reference to Bayle is found in Book I, Part iv, Section v[1] where Hume criticizes the argument of Spinoza in the Dictionary. Fénelon appears to have influenced Hume largely in reference to thoughts on atheism and the proofs for the existence of God. Dubos' main interest was in aesthetics; he erected a system on the feelings rather than on reason and thus provided Hume with the type of thinking which he also found in Hutcheson's work. William King likely influenced Hume by means of references to John Gay's dissertation in which ethical utilitarianism is combined with psychological associationism.

The task of tracing influences on Hume is extremely arduous simply because he was distinctly a man of letters and as such concerned himself with all topics of current interest from that point of view. He was not primarily interested in polemical writing in the same sense that both Locke and Berkeley directed their arguments against the Cartisians and mathematicians. References to other authors in Hume's works are made, for the most part, simply as passing literary allusions. He refers to Seneca, Plutarch, Longinus, and Virgil and to the

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see Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 325-338; 506-516; and Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, pp. 80-86.

[1] T, 241-244.

French literary men such as Montaigne, La Bruyére, Fénelon, and Boileau. The most specific references are to be found in Hume's discussion of morals for it is here that he definitely opposes the point of view of a school. As one commentator puts it:

> Hume's knowledge of the ethical discussions of his contemporaries is so thoroughly attested by his citations of them that it would be superfluous to give illustrations. Although his early reading was done in comparative isolation, it led him into the very center of those subjects that were of greatest contemporary interest.[1]

In the more metaphysical parts of his work Hume mentions Locke and Berkeley and refers to the Cartesians, particularly Malebranche, upon several points.[2] There is direct evidence that Hume knew the disputes being carried on in theology. He had read Tillotson's sermons on miracles;[3] and Cudworth and Clarke are quoted on causation.[4] In Cudworth's The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part; Wherein, All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted; and Its Impossibility Demonstrated (1678) Hume could get much information on the atheistical arguments of both ancient and modern thinkers, for their positions were quoted at length by the Cambridge Platonist. There is a reference to the modern sceptic Huet in the Dialogues.[5]

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[1] Mary Shaw Kuypers, Studies in the Eighteenth Century Background of Hume's Empiricism (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1930), pp. 12-13. See also pp. 64-66.

[2] C. W. Hendel contends that Hume learned a religious scepticism from Malebranche, especially in terms of the imperfections and limitations of man's mental endowment. [Hendel, op. cit., pp. 31-57.]

[3] E, 108. [4] T, 80; E, 73. [5] D, 138.

Hume had some direct acquaintance with scientific and mathematical works, but it is probable that his knowledge "did not go far beyond those books which were counted as literature or which had aroused sufficient controversy to be popular."[1] Hume refers to Newton's theory of the ether[2] and quotes from the Principia.[3] His philosophy shows comprehension of the metaphysical questions which Newtonian science had raised. In his discussion of mathematics, reference is made to Malezieu's Éléments de Géométria de Mr. le duc de Bourgogne[4] and Barrow's Mathematical Lectures.[5] The Dialogues indicate that Hume knew Galileo's Dialogue concerning the Two Great Systems of the World.[6]

What then may we conclude from these literary allusions and references? Certainly they indicate rather significantly that Hume read widely in both ancient and modern works. Besides this, the references serve to shed some light on his knowledge of contemporary discussion and on the character of his reading. Mary Shaw Kuypers has summarized the situation very well in the following statement:

> This scattering of names, taken alone, indicates little more than that Hume had the kind of acquaintance with the books of his day that we should expect of a man of letters whose main devotion was to philosophy. He knew directly some of the great scientific works which occupied so important a place in the intellectual life of his time; he had more intimate knowledge of the philosophic tradition which had developed in the interpretation of science. The internal evidence which the Treatise and Enquiry furnish bears out this view.[7]

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[1] Kuypers, op. cit., p. 12. [2] E, 73n.

[3] T, 638-639. [4] T, 30. [5] T, 46-47. [6] D, 151.

[7] Kuypers, op. cit., p. 66.

Kemp Smith has given us good reason to disregard the commonly held supposition that Hume approached his questions in Book I of the Treatise through the examination of the general problems of the Cartesian philosophy.[1] Although the traditional supposition may be plausible, there are factors involved in Hume's thought which point to an interest in moral theory as his introduction to philosophy. It appears that a reversal of the roles hitherto ascribed to reason and to feeling respectively is what is truly distinctive and central in Hume's teaching; he subsequently attempted to apply this point of view in the treatment of all judgments of matters of fact and existence. Kemp Smith gives evidence to substantiate the view that Books II and III of the Treatise are in date of first composition prior to the working out of the doctrines dealt with in Book I. The first book is a result of the extension of Hume's doctrines, first noted in connection with moral and aesthetic judgments, into the theory of knowledge. Kemp Smith's argument is based on the often unrecognized influence of Francis Hutcheson upon Hume. Hutcheson's works appeared between 1725-1728 and were the immediate occasion of Hume's awakening, according to Kemp Smith. There is a great amount of circumstantial evidence to support this argument. Francis Hutcheson was the dominant figure in Scottish philosophy during Hume's formative years, and it was to him that Hume turned for advice on the composition and publication of the Treatise.[2]

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[1]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 3-20.

[2]Letters, I, 32-35; 36-40.

As we shall see later, it was Hutcheson's failure to support him in his bid for the chair of moral philosophy in the University of Edinburgh that hurt Hume very deeply.

Francis Hutcheson, in collaboration with the early Moderates in the Church, advocated tolerance and humanism in place of the bigoted creed and fanatical enthusiasm of the Covenanters. His influence as a professor resulted in the growth of a powerful group of his students among the Church's ministers.[1] Hutcheson constructed on the system of Locke a defence of Shaftesbury[2] whose views he expounded and systematized; Shaftesbury was represented as the enemy of fanaticism. By the aid of Locke's philosophy, Hutcheson thought it possible to retain enough theological doctrine to constitute a kind of natural religion; experience and the study of human nature were to take the place of the fervid supernaturalism of the Confession of Faith. The supernatural was not denied but more or

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[1]Accounts of Hutcheson's popularity as a professor may be found in Henry Grey Graham, Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1908), Chapter II; Carlyle, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

[2]Shaftesbury opposed the doctrine of election by postulating the existence of a God whose ruling desire was the happiness of His creatures. Enthusiasm and ecstatic utterances were criticized and theology was stripped of its mystical qualities in favor of morality. Shaftesbury's humanism based conduct on sentiment rather than on reason. As an unqualified optimist, Shaftesbury asserted that humanity is endowed with a moral sense which is instinctive but capable of cultivation; and viewed as a self-reliant being, man is capable of fulfilling the purpose of his existence. There can be no conflict between social and individual welfare, since a certain harmony between the self-regarding and the disinterested affections is essential to both. Virtue is identified with beauty, morality with aesthetics; man is conscious of an inward harmony and conceives the possibility of a society no less exquisitely attuned. [See W. R. Scott, op. cit., pp. 148-181.]

less ignored, and the deity was used as a kind of philosophic figure-head.

Experience--not revelation--was made the starting point in Hutcheson's ethical teaching. While he maintained that God had implanted in mankind a desire for a beauty in character, Hutcheson insisted that in manners the pleasure to be derived from virtuous emotion does not detract from its disinterestedness. The doctrine of natural depravity was opposed with an optimistic utilitarian theory of morals; the sanctions of morality were to be found in the constitution of human nature. He taught that the soul of man was inclined more to virtue than to vice. The law of benevolence was in his opinion as universal as that of gravitation; of each of these "tendencies" it could be affirmed that it "increases as the Distance is diminish'd, and is strongest where Bodys come to touch each other."[1]

In Hutcheson's teaching Locke's theory of ideas is modified; the distinction between inner and outer sense is restated so that the inner senses (or impressions of reflections which are not copies of impressions but arise from the mind itself antecedent to impressions) are extended to include moral and aesthetic senses. We are determined in our judgments

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[1] [Francis Hutcheson], Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; In Two Treatises (London: J. and J. Knapton, et.al., 1729), p. 222. "I doubt we have made Philosophy, as well as Religion, by our foolish management of it, so austere and ungainly a Form, that a Gentleman cannot easily bring himself to like it; and those who are strangers to it, can scarcely bear to hear our Description of it." [Ibid, "Preface," p. xv.]

of good and evil as well as in aesthetic judgments of beauty and deformity by the original character of human nature. All such judgments are the same in that they are involuntary (not determined by the will) and distinterested (they lack any sort of rational justification). Moral and aesthetic judgments, resting exclusively on feeling, are non-cognitive or non-rational; they are not based on rational grounds and are arrived at immediately upon the apprehension of their object. It was Hutcheson's contention that these empirical judgments rest not on reason or on reflectively considered data, but solely on feeling. Kemp Smith maintains that this idea constituted the main influence in opening to Hume his new scheme of thought in which passion or feeling took over the place formerly assigned to reason. In adhering closely to the criticism of moral theory found in Francis Hutcheson, Hume formed the central unity in his own philosophy--the subordination of reason to feeling and instinct made dominant throughout. In placing the major derivation of Hume's philosophy on that of Hutcheson, Kemp Smith limited the influence of the sources which tradition had been accustomed to stress.[1]

We need not discuss Kemp Smith's arguments in detail; it will serve our purpose here to state briefly the evidence cited to confirm his conclusions. For external evidence the letter addressed to a physician[2] is cited in which, Kemp Smith

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[1]See Kemp Smith's discussion "Hutcheson's Teaching and its Influence on Hume," in The Philosophy of David Hume, pp.23-51.

[2]Supra, pp. 140-142.

contends, Hume has informed us that his philosophy originated in his preoccupation with moral questions. There are also clues in the "Introduction" to the Treatise where Hume mentions Locke, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler as having preceded him in the tasks he now endeavors to undertake. It seems strange that he would specifically refer to these philosophers if his ethics, as is generally assumed, is merely an application of the principles reached in his epistemology. Hume's description of the Treatise in its sub-title as "An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects" also bears out the suggestion of a primary moral interest in his thought. The fact that in later life, when evaluating his literary works, Hume regarded the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals as his best book likewise points to a predominance of moral interest in his philosophy. Kemp Smith believes this new approach to Hume enables us to arrive at an appropriate explanation of many features of his teaching which otherwise would be difficult to interpret. Hume's varying treatment of the self in Books I and II of the Treatise and his manner of envisaging causality as an independent law of association are two concepts which Kemp Smith feels can now be satisfactorily explained. Much that had previously been obscure or strangely worded in the opening sections of the Treatise takes on new meaning when seen in the light of Hutcheson's influence on Hume.

There are, of course, other sources for Hume's philosophy

as Kemp Smith proceeds to point out.[1] Although Hume derived, to a great extent, the formulation of his philosophical problem from Francis Hutcheson, the philosophical method came from Newton and Locke. It is quite evident that Hume modelled his associationist explanation of mental phenomena on the pattern of the Newtonian physics. Also traceable to Newton was Hume's emphasis on experiment and the complementary doctrine that there are ultimate human experiences resting for us on secret causes. Kemp Smith contends that these doctrines conflict with the concepts acquired from Hutcheson and involve Hume in some of his more obvious and important difficulties. Locke's influence was mainly in the matter of terminology and in the sensationalist basis of Hume's thought. Locke's theory of ideas was used by Hume to show our dependence on instinct and feeling in the moral and aesthetic as well as in the epistemological realm; thus, the information we receive through the senses is restricted in content. The influence of Berkeley on Hume is discounted by Kemp Smith as a misrepresentation; Hume did not follow Berkeley to the extent of a complete denial of the material world. Hume's central problem was simply to show that belief in the world does not rest on logical proof; to assert further that therefore external reality does not exist would be beyond Hume's purpose. Hume is indebted to Berkeley primarily in respect to the question--"What part do images play in abstract thinking and how do they function as though they were

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[1]Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 53-76.

universals."[1] But to argue that it was Hume's sole purpose to carry out logically the principles of Locke and Berkeley is to miss completely the more important positive contributions Hume has to offer.

The true objective towards which Hume's philosophy was directed seems to have been a complete study of the science of man. Kemp Smith's The Philosophy of David Hume has emphasized this fact, and a great deal has been done in this book with respect to an explanation of Hume's conception of human nature and his positive philosophy. Suggestions for interpretation are made by Kemp Smith which should be used for a proper understanding of Hume's views on religion. In the light of this interpretation we now turn our attention to an investigation of Hume's attitude towards religion at the time of the composition of the Treatise.

The Years in France

Hume met while in Paris a fellow countryman, the Chevalier Ramsay, disciple of Fénelon, author of The Travels of Cyrus (1727) and Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion unfolded in a Geometrical Order (1748-49), a former tutor of Prince Charles Edward Stuart and a cousin of Hume's boyhood friend, Michael Ramsay.[2] Judging from a letter written sometime afterwards to an unknown correspondent,

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[1] Ibid., p. 257n.

[2] Greig, op. cit., pp. 91-92. See G. D. Henderson, Chevalier Ramsay (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1952), p. 7.

Ramsay did not form a high opinion of Hume. Ramsay wrote:

> A Gentlemen we speak of sent me his Essay upon humane Nature about 15 Months ago by one Sir John Ramsay, a Countryman of ours now at Angers. I have neither had time nor health to peruse such an obscure, dark, intricate performance. . . By the litle I heard from & read of that young Gentleman he seems to me far from being a True master of metaphysiks . . . . That bright Ingenius young Spark does not seem to me to have acquir'd a sufficient Stock of solid Learning, nor to be born with a fund of noble Sentiments, nor to have a genius capable of all that Geometrical attention, penetration and Justness, necessary to make a True Metaphysician. I am affrayd his spirit is more lively than solid, his Imagination more luminous than profound, and his heart too dissipated with material objects & spiritual Self-Idolatry to pierce into the sacred recesses of divine Truths. . . .
>
> He seems to me one of those philosophers who think to spin out Systems, out of their own brain, without any regard to religion, antiquity or Tradition sacred or profane. . . .[1]

This is, of course, a prejudiced estimate by a convert from Presbyterianism to Catholicism of the mystical variety called Quietism. Ramsay undoubtedly was opinionated and dogmatic and his mystical religious views would not allow him to accept the enthusiastically sceptical young Hume.[2] But we can, with some assurance, regard the Hume of 1734 as both

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[1] Andrew Michael Ramsay, MS letter, 24 Aug. 1742, in Report on the Laing Manuscripts preserved in the University of Edinburgh (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1925), II, 330-333.

[2] It is interesting to note Hume's estimate of Ramsay as "an author of taste and imagination, who was surely no enemy to Christianity . . . a writer, who had so laudable an inclination to be orthodox, that his reason never found any difficulty, even in the doctrines which free-thinkers scruple most, the trinity, incarnation, and satisfaction: His humanity alone, of which he seems to have had a great stock, rebelled against the doctrines of eternal reprobation and predestination." After quoting the Chevalier at quite some length, Hume concludes, "I thought the opinions of this ingenious author very curious; but I pretend not to warrant the justness of them." [G.G. IV, 355-356n.]

aggressive and spiritually self-idolatrous. He had just left his home in Scotland and had, in effect, asserted his independence for the first time, turning his back on the religious enthusiasm which surrounded him in Scotland.

A common topic of conversation in France during these years was that of the recent miracles of the Abbé Paris at St. Médard. These happenings at the tomb of this Jansenist filled society and the church with excitement. The Abbé had been noted for his sanctity and charity and when he died many admirers came to his tomb to pay their respects. It was discovered that their devotion was rewarded; sick, halt, and blind were miraculously cured. For quite some time the Jesuits, who resented these events, were unable to discredit the evidence for the miracles. Finally they were able to persuade the government to close the gates of the cemetery to the public in 1732. All this occurred just two years before Hume visited France. The references to these events made an impression on his mind and he began to meditate on the topic of the miraculous in relation to religion. That he heard about these miracles and that his interest was aroused is evident from the fact that the "Abbé Paris occurrences" are prominently referred to in the essay "Of Miracles." In a footnote there is a special reference to the importance of the subject in the minds of the people of France at that time.[1] Hume's critical frame of mind and interest in scientific method and history would cause him to take an interest in such matters and the result was his famous essay.

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[1]G. G., IV, 101-103n.

After visiting Paris, Hume travelled to Rheims and then made his way to La Flèche in Anjou, famous as the site of the Jesuit College where Descartes was educated. Despite the vast difference in their respective outlooks, Hume evidently was able to maintain cordial relations with the Jesuits. He walked in the cloisters of the college and on one occasion, at least, discussed the subject of miracles with one of the priests. It was probably while the stories of the Abbé Paris were fresh in his memory that Hume began to form the principal theory of his essay "Of Miracles." In reporting the incident at the college to the Reverend George Campbell in 1762 Hume says,

> I was walking in the cloisters of the Jesuit's College of La Flèche, a town in which I passed two years of my youth and engaged in a conversation with a Jesuit of some parts and learning, who was relating to me, and urging some nonsensical miracle performed in their convent, when I was tempted to dispute against him; and as my head was full of the topics of my Treatise of Human Nature, which I was at that time composing, this argument [in the essay "Of Miracles"] immediately occurred to me, and I thought it very much gravelled my companion; but at last he observed to me, that it was impossible for that argument to have any solidity, because it operated equally against the Gospel as the Catholic miracles;--which observation I thought proper to admit as a sufficient answer.[1]

The argument that had caused the Jesuit so much consternation was directed against the proof of miracles.[2] We may well see the reason for Hume's argument after we have considered the basic postulates of the Treatise of Human Nature.

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[1] Letters, I, 361. [2] E, 115-116. See infra, pp. 234-35.

The Treatise of Human Nature

Most of the actual composition of the Treatise was completed during Hume's residence in France and the manuscript was virtually ready for the press when he returned to London in 1737 to arrange for publication. "By the middle of 1737, after nearly three years of intensive writing, the Treatise of Human Nature was substantially completed. The ideas which earlier in Scotland had proved so recalcitrant had finally fallen into place."[1] While he was waiting for the booksellers to accept his book, Hume revised certain portions that no longer pleased him. In a letter to Henry Home of Kames, he wrote:

> . . . I began to feel some passages weaker for the style and diction than I could have wisht. The nearness and greatness of the event roused up my attention, and made me more difficult to please, than when I was alone in perfect tranquility in France.[2]

Hume became concerned about the possible consequences of some of the daring implications of the original thoughts contained in the Treatise. He knew that his views would cause a strong reaction, for they indeed would be regarded as subversive not only to traditional moral philosophy but also to the doctrines of established religion. He felt that the passage in which he had made an analysis of miracles would almost certainly give offence. Hume, withdrawing this section, enclosed it in a letter to Home and said,

> Having a frankt letter, I was resolved to make use of it; and accordingly inclose some "Reasonings concerning

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 104.

[2]Letters, I, 24.

> Miracles," which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much offence, even as the world is disposed at present. . . . the force of the argument you'll be judge of, as it stands . . . I beg of you to show it to nobody, except Mr. Hamilton, if he pleases; and let me know at your leasure that you have received it, read it, and burnt it.[1]

It appears that Hume was keen upon having the opinion of Bishop Joseph Butler who had, in the immediately preceding year, published The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature. Hume was impressed with Butler and his teaching[2] and when the Treatise was finished, he obtained a letter of introduction to the reverend philosopher in the hope of eliciting some opinions on the merit of the work on human nature. However, a mere accident prevented the meeting. The choice of such a man is indeed curious if Hume had actually turned completely against religion and the Church, a view that is all too commonly held even today.

Fearing that some of his opinions might repel the devout moralist, Hume tried to tone down the manuscript before attempting to meet Butler. In the letter to Henry Home, Hume says,

> Your thoughts and mine agree with respect to Dr Butler, and I would be glad to be introduced to him. I am at present castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts; that is, endeavouring it shall give as little offence as possible, before which, I could not pretend to put it into the Doctor's hands. This is a piece of cowardice, for which I blame myself, though I believe none of my friends will blame me. But I was

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[1] Letters, I, 24-25.

[2] Mossner suggests that Hume had Butler in mind in the arguments of the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and that Cleanthes is representative of Butler's teaching. See E. C. Mossner, "The Enigma of Hume," in Mind, XIV (1936), 339-349.

> resolved not to be an enthusiast in philosophy, while I was blaming other enthusiasms.[1]

It was regard for Butler's opinion that caused Hume to cut out the section on miracles which he had evidently composed at La Flèche. These thoughts, having been sent to Henry Home for criticism both as to argument and style, were not published until eleven years later and then against Home's advice that they be totally suppressed. The argument on miracles was never restored to its original place in the Treatise, a fact that should not be overlooked when one attempts to account for the clamor the essay caused in the camps of orthodoxy. Hume was right when he told Home, "There is something in the turn of thought, and a good deal in the turn of expression, which will not perhaps appear so proper, for want of knowing the context."[2] Perhaps if the essay "Of Miracles" had appeared where it was originally intended, Hume would not have been charged with desiring notoriety at all costs. One cannot help believing its relevance would have been much more apparent within the Treatise than it ever was as one of the Philosophical Essays.

It is unfortunate that Hume was never able to meet Butler. We know that he tried at least once,[3] but when Butler was made Bishop of Bristol, Hume evidently felt that a mere

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[1] Letters, I, 25. [2] Letters, I, 24.

[3] "I shall not trouble you with any formal compliments or thanks, which would be but an ill return for the kindness you have done me in writing in my behalf, to one you are so little acquainted with as Dr Butler; and I am afraid stretching the truth in favour of a friend. I have called upon the Doctor, with a design of delivering him your letter, but find he is at present in the country. I am a little anxious to have the Doctor's opinion." [Letter to Henry Home. Letters, I, 25.]

letter of introduction was not sufficient to gain an audience with a bishop. Relinquishing his attempt at personal acquaintance, he had to be content with any second hand comments Butler might be willing to make. Referring to the Treatise Hume says, "I have sent the Bishop of Bristol a copy; but could not wait on him with your letter after he had arrived at that dignity. At least I thought it would be to no purpose after I begun the printing."[1] Whether Hume would have seen fit to make any major changes in the Treatise on the basis of Butler's advice is difficult to say, but it is more than likely that he would have taken a very different view of clergymen had he been able to know Butler. One commentator makes the following observation:

> [Hume's] experience of Churchmen was unfortunately limited. As far as we can tell, he had known only rather harsh and unenlightened Presbyterians in Scotland, whom he heartily disliked, and even less enlightened Roman Catholic priests in France, whom he heartily despised. Butler was a churchman of a different stamp. Devout without bigotry, courteous and enlightened, gentle but acute, he could hardly fail to have impressed Hume in conversation; the more so as he had already prepossessed him in his favour by his books. The result of several meetings might have been a softening of Hume's bitterness against churches; which would not have done him any harm as a philosopher, or in later years, as a historian.[2]

The seventeen thirties in London were a period of philosophical-religious controversy between the Deists who adhered to the "Religion of Nature or Reason" and the Christian apologists with their "Religion of Revelation." Matthew Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation: Or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature, published in the first

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[1] Letters, I, 27. [2] Greig, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

year of the decade, drew a number of replies from the orthodox, of which Butler's Analogy was the most influential. In 1739 orthodox Christians published the Boyle Lectures entitled A Defence of Natural and Revealed Religion. If Hume had retained the section "Of Miracles" in the Treatise, he would inevitably have been involved in the midst of this religious controversy. As it was, the religious implications of his argument were for the most part overlooked. If he had not used the surgical knife in cutting off the "noble Parts . . . endeavouring it shall give as little offence as possible," we may be assured that the religious import of his philosophy would have been more apparent to his contemporaries. There might even have been a few who would have recognized that his principles put an end to the controversies between Deists and Christians. Both sides were wrong, according to Hume's analysis; a rationalistic proof of matters of fact is insufficient whether it be based on natural religion or on authoritarian arguments.

To discover Hume's attitude towards religion by an examination of some relevant passages in the Treatise is a difficult task due to the fact that he eliminated much of his original theological thought before publication. Nevertheless, an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the place of religion in his philosophy is necessary for a proper understanding of his religious attitude. We have observed in the progress of Hume's life and thought a separation from philosophic and religious tradition and the development of a sceptical frame of mind. Hume himself appears to have regarded his own

scepticism as a vital part of his system and, as Constance Maund has pointed out, "he took the greatest trouble to state it as clearly as he could [so that] it is probably the best expressed of all his views. . . ."[1]

Considering scepticism to be one of the most important of his doctrines, Hume used (in Book I of the Treatise) a critical and negative method of approach which he hoped would serve to clear the field of error. He was correct when he admitted that the Treatise had suffered from the arrangement of the argument, for the critical element is so prominent throughout the discussion that the reader gets the impression that Hume is merely negative or sceptical. When we carefully examine the thought, however, we see that there is also a positive theory of the understanding. This leads to the suggestion that the destructive argument was purposely introduced to make clear Hume's problem and the proposed solution to it. His discussion of space and time[2] gives a clue to what he was doing. There he pointed out that, if mathematical points and physical points were the only possibilities, infinite divisibility would have to be accepted. But in fact infinite divisibility need not be accepted because it was not the sole remaining possibility. For Hume it was quite clear that there was a way out of his criticism, destructive of all three views; the solution was an empirical one. Scepticism, then,

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[1]Constance Maund, Hume's Theory of Knowledge, A Critical Examination (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1937), p. 233.

[2]T, 26-68.

was not caused by empiricism but was due to the difficulties and contradictions into which reason fell. Empiricism in Hume's thought was a means of obviating scepticism.

If we analyze the succeeding topics in the Treatise a similar view is found underlying the arguments. The idea of causation is not intelligible or explicable on the basis of reason, but an empirical solution can be formulated to explain our belief in cause and effect.[1] Likewise, the same method of argument is followed in the treatment of the problems of the self and of an external world.[2] In ethics Hume attacked rationalism and substituted as his solution an empirical theory of moral sense and a conception of utility; reason is not the judge of moral issues.[3] It is evident that he was not maintaining a sceptical position nor did he consider himself a total sceptic for he said concerning Berkeley in an often overlooked footnote in An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding,

> . . . most of the writings of that very ingenious author form the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted. He professes, however, in his title-page (and undoubtedly with great truth) to have composed his book against the sceptics as well as against the atheists and free thinkers. But that all his arguments, though otherwise intended, are, in reality, merely sceptical, appears from this, that they admit of no answer and produce no conviction. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion which is the result of scepticism.[4]

In each of the discussions of the problems in Book I

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[1] T, 73-83. [2] T, 251-262; 187-218.

[3] T, 455-476. [4] E, 155n.

of the Treatise Hume formulated scepticism with the view of refuting it. Throughout his writings he made explicit statements of his attitude towards scepticism. In a letter to James Balfour, who had made a criticism of Hume's theory of morals, he said, "I have surely endeavoured to refute the Sceptic with all the force of which I am master; and my refutation must be allowed sincere, because drawn from the capital principles of my system."[1] In the Treatise in dealing with Sceptical Philosophy he made the following statement:

> Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable.
>
> My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures.[2]

Hume defined scepticism primarily as a spirit of inquiry or as a method of examination. The reason for scepticism becomes apparent when we understand Hume's teaching about man as primarily an active and only secondarily a reflective being. Man is a believing animal and, in consequence of this, also a credulous animal. Belief as a passion conspires to bring man into subjection to influences which are unconsidered and often malign. It is as a safeguard against these evils (which are reinforced by the influences of the state, of education, and especially of religion) and, in modest collaboration with nature, that Hume advocates a sceptical attitude.[3] Kemp

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[1] Letters, I, 173. [2] T, 183.

[3] Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. 130-131.

Smith points out that "when Hume lays claim, as he indeed does, to the title 'sceptic,' he means thereby not a self-defeating scepticism, which in discrediting reason blunts the weapons that have to be relied upon in the battle with the forces of fanaticism and superstition, but a scepticism of the aristocratic, academic type--what Hume himself also entitles a 'mitigated' scepticism--the scepticism which has its source in a fastidious insistence that while our standards of judgment must indeed be appropriate to the kind of problem which is being dealt with, these standards must be held to with the uttermost rigour."[1]

The aim of Hume's scepticism was not to shake belief but only to make it clear that it is mere belief, and not, as hitherto held, demonstrative or factual knowledge. By doubting, we can define the boundary between knowledge and belief and thus destroy that absolute confidence which is a hindrance rather than a help to investigation. Hume's problem in the Treatise involved the formulation of a logic which would leave room for taste and sentiment without giving any encouragement to the visionary. He endeavored to develop a scepticism deep enough to dispel the presumption that a developed science would be purely "rational," but sufficiently "mitigated" to allow for the supremacy of science over superstition. Hume was faced with the task of describing the reasonableness of science without falling into either scepticism or rationalism.

Hume directed his criticism not only against the

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[1]Kemp Smith, "David Hume, 1739-1939," p. xii.

arguments of the theologians and moralists but also against what he took to be the philosophic bearings of contemporary science.[1] It is not only in religion and morals, Hume contends, that man believes according to the special contacts of his experience but also in his science. Belief, not reason, is the basis of man's knowledge of the world. Hume's arguments undermined every rationalistic structure which had been raised upon the foundations of the Newtonian science.

Keeping Hume's intention and hypothesis in mind, we now endeavor to examine the effect of his scepticism on the problems of religion. Beginning with a sceptical analysis, Hume attacked the intelligibility of both philosophical and religious ideas. The rationalistic theology of Hume's day found its best ally in science, and in combating the one, he found it impossible to avoid condemning the other.[2] Hume rules out the types of rationalism which identified causes with logical grounds. He denied the possibility of extending knowledge, by means of the causal inference, to objects beyond experience. Therefore, neither God nor matter, defined as beyond the reach of the sense, can be inferred from the facts of experience.

In the criticism of the idea of a Divine Being,[3] Hume's attack was directed against dogmatism or rationalism. The rationalists were usually theologians interested in discovering indubitable foundations for the code of Christianity. They wished to make morality or "natural religion" the basis for a

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[1] See Kuypers, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

[2] Ibid., p.72. [3] T, 240-249.

defence of revealed religion.[1] Rationalism served as the technique of dogmatism in ethics and politics as well as in theology. Hume opposed these rationalistic arguments and contended that there are no rational grounds for beliefs in these spheres. In denying the accepted rationalist basis for the religion of his day, Hume did not advocate science in opposition to religion but rather pleaded for an empiricism in which natural belief was basic.

Hume contends that the belief in a God is full of difficulties when we try to defend it by reason. A dogmatism that attempts such reasoning is really impious and leads into the grossest absurdities. It either involves the acknowledgment "that the deity is the author of all our volitions and perceptions . . . . and thus the supreme being is the real cause of all our actions, bad as well as good, vicious as well as virtuous,"[2] or else it limits the divine power by limiting our knowledge of the nature of this power to an idea "deriv'd from particular impressions, none of which contain any efficacy, nor seem to have <u>any</u> connexion with <u>any</u> other existence."[3] Hume found that the conception of a cause is rationally indefensible as is the notion of external bodies. The incorporeal is also incomprehensible and the soul of man is just as unintelligible as external bodies. The doctrines of religion are likewise incapable of metaphysical or rational justification; there is no rational demonstration for the existence of God. Scepticism had shown this to be so.

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[1]Kuypers, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 93. [2]T, 249. [3]T, 248.

Hume makes his anti-rationalistic position evident in the treatment of the simplicity of the soul and the relations of that problem to free-thinking materialism.[1] He boldly charged his opponents with atheism comparable to Spinoza's. Any attempt to establish the simplicity and immateriality of the soul leads inevitably to atheism. As these views are held on the basis of reason, Hume's criticism of them, as well as of Spinoza, is an attack on rationalism. Scepticism indicates that material and immaterial things are incomprehensible from the side of both sense and reason.

In speaking of Spinoza's "hideous hypothesis" it is apparent that Hume does not regard himself as being an atheist. He mentions a "true religion" and claims that natural religion is "in some measure dependent on the science of Man."[2] Hume admits that the things men think about the "Deity" and the "Life to come" are important to them. There is no denying the fact of men's beliefs. The real question concerns the meaning of religious beliefs and the way in which they have arisen. Hume manifests a genuine concern over the "momentous consequences" of his own theory. He wants to know what it is that induces men to believe in providence and immortal life. He finds it necessary in his study of human nature to examine the special experiences and interests of humanity impelling men to believe in religious verities.

The results of Hume's studies in religion lead him to believe that there is no explicit natural theology in the sense

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[1] T, 234ff.

[2] T, xix.

of a definite, stable science of the Deity and His relations to man. But neither religion nor morals suffer from the unavoidable imperfections of our ideas concerning the Deity.[1]

> The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is constantly attended with the obedience of every creature and being. Nothing more is requisite to give a foundation to all the articles of religion, nor is it necessary we shou'd form a distinct idea of the force and energy of the supreme Being.[2]

For the most part Hume was very prudent in his statements about religion in the Treatise. It appears that he did not want to contradict the common religious beliefs. At the close of Section vi, Part IV, Hume claims,

> There is only one occasion, when philosophy will think it necessary and even honourable to justify herself, and that is, when religion may seem to be in the least offended. . . . If any one, therefore, shou'd imagine that the foregoing arguments are any ways dangerous to religion, I hope the following apology will remove his apprehensions.
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> . . . If my philosophy . . . makes no addition to the arguments for religion, I have at least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but that every thing remains precisely as before.[3]

Reception of the Treatise

That Hume regarded his philosophy as revolutionary and expected the Treatise to cause a great stir in the intellectual world may be seen in the reference to his work when he informed Henry Home,

> I am sorry I am not able to satisfy your curiosity by giving you some general notion of the plan upon which I proceed. But my opinions are so new, and even some terms I am obliged to make use of, that I could not propose, by any abridgement to give my system an air of likelihood, or so much as make it intelligible.[4]

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[1] T, 633n. Cf. 160. [2] T, 633n. [3] T, 250-251.

[4] Letters, I, 23-24.

And writing to Home again after the Treatise was published he says, "My principles are also so remote from all the vulgar Sentiments on this subject, that were they to take place, they would produce almost a total alteration in philosophy; and you know, revolutions of this kind are not easily brought about."[1]

Anxiously awaiting the effect of his first literary attempt on the world, Hume listened eagerly for the discussions he was sure his theories would create; he had issued a challenge to the philosophers of Europe. But instead of a storm, his book failed to arouse interest. "Never literary Attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Human Nature," he wrote in "My Own Life"; "It fell dead-born from the Press; without reaching such distinction as even to excite a Murmur among the Zealots."[2] Except for a few obscure reviews which were quite abusive,[3] the Treatise was, for the most part, neglected.

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[1] Letters, I, 26. [2] Letters, I, 2.

[3] For a discussion of the reviews of the Treatise, see E. C. Mossner, "The Continental Reception of Hume's Treatise, 1739-1741," in Mind LVI (1947), 31-43; E. C. Mossner, "First Answer to Hume's Treatise: An Unnoticed Item of 1740," in Journal of the History of Ideas, XII (1951), 291-294; and Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 119-125; 128-131; 618-619. Mossner suggests that William Warburton may have written the review for the History of the Works of the Learned. [Cf. Burton, op. cit., I, 109 and Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, p. 523n.] [Here it is intimated that Warburton may have been the reviewer.] A perusal of the article reveals two violently opposed themes which led Kemp Smith to suggest that it may have been written by two different men. [Cf. Quarterly Review (1846), Art. XXVI, 362, 376. ". . . criticism of Hume's Treatise--in The Works of of the Learned--is such a mixture of censure and sarcasm, with a prognostication of future fame, that it has been thought to be the joint contribution of two authors."] This "somewhat abusive" review (as Hume termed it) set the standard for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries misrepresentations of the Treatise in

Those individuals who did read the book were seemingly unable to understand the argument. One critic refuted the Treatise mainly "on the grounds that it was so completely incomprehensible as to delude the weak-minded into accepting it as high philosophy."[1] Hume was attacked on elementary points of arithmatic and basic ignorance of scientific method. The foremost complaint was made against his manner of expression and exposition. Style seemed to attract more notice than content, and Hume's attempt to reach his contemporaries' understanding had succeeded merely in raising their literary prejudices. The readers of the Treatise, however few they may have been, failed completely to see the point of Hume's thoughts.

The immediate reception given to the Treatise was disappointing to Hume. Its failure to awaken any marked interest was such as to lend an author anything but encouragement. Unwilling to see his principles fade away into oblivion, Hume prepared his own abstract of the Treatise which appeared in 1740 as a pamphlet--An Abstract of a Book lately Published; Entituled a Treatise of Human Nature, &c. Wherein the Chief Argument of that Book is Farther Illustrated and Explained. The Abstract is certainly valuable in that it shows clearly and forcefully what Hume had intended as the chief argument of the Treatise. In the preface of the pamphlet he points out

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the basic respects of restricting interest to Book I, of deliberately misrepresenting the text, and of entering into ridicule and abuse rather than attempting to refute the book by argument.

[1]See Mossner, "The First Answer to Hume's Treatise," p. 293.

the revolutionary nature of his thinking:

> The book seem'd to me to have such an air of singularity, and novelty as claim'd the attention of the public; especially if it be found, as the Author seems to insinuate, that were his philosophy receiv'd, we must alter from the foundation of the greatest part of the sciences. Such bold attempts are always advantageous in the republic of letters, because they shake off the yoke of authority, accustom men to think for themselves, give new hints, which men of genius may carry further, and by the very opposition, illustrate points, wherein no one before suspected any difficulty.[1]

In the Abstract both the revolutionary and the constructive sides of Hume's thinking stand out clearly. The opening pages emphasize the systematic and constructive aspects of his system:

> Beside the satisfaction of being acquainted with what most nearly concerns us, it may be safely affirmed, that almost all the sciences are comprehended in the science of human nature, and are dependent on it. The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and Operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas; morals and criticism regard our tastes and sentiments; and politics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other. This treatise therefore of human nature seems intended for a system of the sciences. The author has finished what regards logic, and has laid the foundation of the other parts in his account of the passions.[2]

In the following passage the destructive element in the Treatise is noted:

> By all that has been said the reader will easily perceive, that the philosophy contain'd in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding. Almost all reasoning is there reduced to experience; and the belief, which attends experience, is explained to be nothing but a peculiar sentiment, or lively conception produced by habit. Nor is this all, when we believe any thing of external existence, or suppose an object to exist a moment after it is no longer perceived, this belief is nothing but a sentiment of the same kind. Our author insists upon several other sceptical topics; and upon the whole concludes,

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[1] A, Preface. [2] A, 7.

> that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy wou'd render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it.[1]

Hume is quite emphatic that the critical tendency of his thought is not to be taken as a scepticism which excludes all knowledge. He believes there is something constructive to be found, and at the close of the Abstract he discusses the determinants of resemblance, contiguity and causation as subordinate parts of his principle of the association of ideas. The pamphlet concludes:

> 'Twill be easy to conceive of what vast consequences these principles must be in the science of human nature, if we consider, that so far as regards the mind, these are the only links that bind the parts of the universe together, or connect us with any person or object exterior to ourselves. For as it is by means of thought only that any thing operates upon our passions, and as these are the only ties of our thoughts, they are really to us the cement of the universe, and all the operations of the mind must, in great measure, depend on them.[2]

A perusal of the Abstract indicates that Hume has reiterated the argument of Book I of the Treatise--a true notion of cause and effect leaves us without absolute certainty in our knowledge of matter of fact. He had been led to write the Treatise by the discovery that some of man's strongest beliefs (especially religious beliefs) cannot be supported by observable facts. It was his concern to distinguish such presumptive beliefs from those which are not. The difference, Hume contended, could best be discovered by comparing these ideas with their corresponding impressions, thus greatly limiting the extent of man's supposed knowledge. He made it clear that he did not intend his thinking to terminate in scepticism;

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[1] A, 24. [2] A, 32.

he believed that a new science could be built on an empirical rather than a rationalistic foundation. Hume's system is naturalistic in the sense that it is based upon an attempt to understand the functioning of the human mind and the whole being of man. And although man is primarily a feeling rather than a reasoning creature, he is still capable of philosophic thought. Hume hoped to carry out his science of human nature continuing with the study of morals, of criticism, and of politics, which for him included both social relations and history. It was in connection with both morals and social relations that Hume found it necessary to discuss the religious beliefs of man.

It was no wonder that Hume, in looking back to the publication of the Treatise, made the remark that it fell dead-born from the press. Not only did critics fail to understand it but they also failed to have any sympathy for his new system of thought. Few of the Treatise's readers ever got beyond the analysis of cause and effect in Book I, and as to an empirical and naturalistic moral philosophy and religion, their minds seemed completely unresponsive. The Treatise, although not totally ignored, was nevertheless totally misunderstood. It was badly misrepresented by all who found time to take any notice of it. Hume himself was regarded as a dogmatic and egotistical author and his work was said to be so abstruse as to be entirely unintelligible. He must have been extremely dismayed to see that his great discoveries were universally ignored by philosophers competent

to deal with them while critics confined their comments to the author's style.[1]

Correspondence with Hutcheson

After telling how the Treatise fell dead-born from the press, Hume continued in "My Own Life": "But being naturally of a cheerful and sanguine Temper, I very soon recovered the Blow, and prosecuted with great Ardour my studies in the Country."[2] Hume had no intention of abandoning the life of letters. The failure of the Treatise he attributed to his own overwhelming desire to get it published quickly; he felt certain that more caution on his part in the matter of literary expression would have insured the book's success. Now it was necessary for him to find a new method of expressing his thoughts, a method that would satisfy the taste of the public. His immediate literary programme included the publication of the third book of the Treatise. By September 1739 Hume sent the manuscript of Book III to Francis Hutcheson for criticism. Admiring Hutcheson's personal conduct as well as his philosophy, Hume believed the professor was the individual who could help most in literary and professional advice. And although Hutcheson was in danger of incurring the wrath of the rigidly righteous against himself,[3] he corresponded with Hume

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[1]See Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 131-132.

[2]Letters, I, 2.

[3]Hutcheson had been in trouble in 1737 with the zealous party of the Glasgow Presbytery for his liberal theology. It was stated that Hutcheson was involved in teaching his students

and sent some reflections on the principles set out in the book on morals.

Friendly relations developed between Hume and Hutcheson even though they differed in their doctrines. Hume excluded theological reasonings from his strictly naturalistic system of ethics whereas Hutcheson attempted to ground his ethics on Christian benevolence.[1] This difference between the two moralists may be seen in a paragraph from Hume's letter of thanks to Hutcheson for the latter's reflections on the manuscript.

> I cannot agree in your Sense of Natural. Tis founded on final Causes; which is a Consideration, that appears to me pretty uncertain & unphilosophical. For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or for the next? For himself or for his Maker? Your definition of Natural depends upon solving these Questions, which are endless, & quite wide of my Purpose. I have never call'd Justice unnatural, but only artificial.[2]

Then, after stating that the question whether natural abilities are virtues or not is simply a dispute of words,[3] Hume continues,

> Were Benevolence the only Virtue no Characters cou'd be mixt, but wou'd depend entirely on their Degrees of Benevolence. Upon the whole, I desire to take my Catalogue of Virtues from Cicero's Offices, not from the Whole Duty of Man. I had, indeed, the former Book in my Eye in all my Reasonings.[4]

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heresy in two false and dangerous doctrines: (1) That the standard of moral goodness was the promotion of the happiness of others; and (2) that we could have a knowledge of good and evil without and prior to a knowledge of God. [W. R. Scott, op. cit., pp. 83-85.] See also John Rae, The Life of Adam Smith (London: Macmillan & Co., 1895), pp. 12f.

[1] W. R. Scott, op. cit., pp. 116-126. [2] Letters, I, 33.

[3] See T, Book III, Part III, Section I.

[4] Letters, I, 34.

Despite their opposing views on the place of theological doctrines in morals, Hume and Hutcheson continued in cordial relationship between the years 1739 and 1744. On March 4, 1740 Hume sought Hutcheson's advice in the choice of a bookseller for the third volume of the Treatise. It appears that Hume was somewhat afraid that "Of Morals" might offend the Christian zealots and he wanted to avoid such offense if possible, for he tells Hutcheson,

> Perhaps you may not care to recommend even to a Bookseller a Book that may give Offence to religious People: Perhaps you may not think it calculated for public Sale. I assure you, therefore, that I shall not take in the least amiss, if you refuse me. I shall only say with regard to the first Article, that the Book is pretty much alter'd since you saw it; & tho' the Clergy be always Enemys to Innovations in Philosophy, yet I do not think they will find any great Matter of Offence in this Volume. On the contrary I shall be disappointed, if Impartial Judges be not much pleas'd with the Soundness of my Morals. I have sent you the Conclusion, as I have alter'd it, that you may see I desire to keep on good Terms even with the strictest & most rigid.[1]

Following this correspondence with another letter on March 16, Hume raises a question concerning certain statements in the Treatise on feeling or sentiment as the basis for moral judgments.[2] Hume writes,

> I must consult you in a Point of Prudence. I have concluded a Reasoning with these two Sentences. "When you pronounce any Action or Character to be vicious, you mean nothing but that from the particular Constitution of your Nature you have a Feeling or Sentiment of Blame from the Contemplation of it. Vices & Virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to Sounds, Colours, Heat & Cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not Qualitys in Objects, but Perceptions in the Mind: And this Discovery in Morals, like that other in Physicks, is to be regarded as a mighty Advancement of the speculative Sciences; tho' like that

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[1] Letters, I, 37.

[2] T, 469.

> too, it has little or no Influence on Practice." Is not this laid a little too strong?[1]

Asking Hutcheson's opinion on this, Hume states, however, that he cannot promise to conform to it and continues, "I wish from my Heart, I cou'd avoid concluding, that since Morality, according to your Opinion as well as mine, is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature & human Life." Hume was unable to follow Hutcheson's attempt to retain a supernatural sanction in ethics and concludes this letter with the following questions:

> If Morality were determined by Reason, that is the same to all rational Beings; But nothing but Experience can assure us, that Sentiments are the same. What Experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all? They have implanted those Sentiments in us for the Conduct of Life like our bodily Sensations, which they possess not themselves. I expect no Answer to these Difficultys in the compass of a Letter.[2]

When Hutcheson's Philosophia moralis institutio compendiaria was published at Glasgow in December, 1742 a copy was sent to Hume by the author. Hume writes, "I receiv'd your very agreeable Present; for which I esteem myself much oblig'd to you" and gives Hutcheson some reflections on the central issue of the ethics. The letter closes with the following words which reveal an aspect of Hume's attitude toward religion at this time: "I must own I am pleas'd to see such Philosophy & such instructive Morals to have once set their Foot in the Schools. I hope they will next get into the World & then into the Churches."[3] Hume's interest in the spread of

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[1] Letters, I, 39-40. [2] Letters, I, 40. [3] Letters, I, 48.

the modern philosophy from the university into the world and ultimately into religious practice is important in understanding his statements on religion in some of his later works.

The Essays Moral and Political

In the years 1739 and 1740 Hume was already laying plans to reach a more popular audience; the result was the Essays Moral and Political published anonymously at Edinburgh late in 1741. The Essays sold extremely well in both Edinburgh and London. A new edition with a few unimportant changes came out in 1742 together with a second volume containing twelve new essays. Originally designed for publication in periodical form, the essays constitute an experiment towards the possible recasting of the philosophy of the Treatise in a new literary form. In Hume's mind the failure of that work had been due to style and form.[1] He had never given up the philosophical principles which had been so sadly misunderstood. He now hoped his ideas would find acceptance in a more popular form--the essay.

Bishop Butler, who had seemingly ignored the Treatise, praised the Essays, and recommended them to his friends. This pleased Hume exceedingly and gave him hope that the principles of the Treatise would be accepted. On the 13th of June 1742 he wrote to Henry Home,

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[1] "I had always entertained a Notion, that my want of success, in publishing the Treatise of human Nature, had proceeded more from the manner than the matter; and that I had been guilty of a very usual Indiscretion, in going to the Press too early." [Letters, I, 3.]

> The Essays are all sold in London, as I am informed by two letters from English gentlemen of my acquaintance. There is a demand for them; and, as one of them tells me, Innys, the great bookseller in Paul's Churchyard, wonders there is not a new edition, for that he cannot find copies for his customers. I am also told that Dr Butler has every where recommended them; so that I hope they will have some success. They may prove like dung with marl, and bring forward the rest of my Philosophy, which is of a more durable, though of a harder and more stubborn nature.[1]

Success in essay-writing and the approbation of the public gave Hume confidence in his literary ability. In "My Own Life" he remarks, "The work was favourably received, and soon made me entirely forget my former Disappointment."[2]

In the first chapter of this thesis it was noted that Hume received criticism for turning from philosophy to essay writing. He was regarded as having an illegitimate literary ambition and in his autobiography he admits that he was anxious for fame. Hume's contemporaries regarded his "love of literary fame" as a craving for mere notoriety, and for the most part, critics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dealt very harshly with him because of this literary ambition. Hume has not been without champions, however, and recent study has tended to defend him as manifesting the highest motives in seeking literary recognition.[3] The accusation that he forsook philosophy for easier forms of writing (i.e., the essay and history) when he found that the Treatise did not make him

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[1] Letters, I, 43.

[2] Letters, I, 2.

[3] See Hendel, op. cit., pp. 10-13; Laing, op. cit., pp. 7-8; Kemp Smith, "David Hume, 1739-1939," pp. i-xxiv; E. C. Mossner, "Philosophy and Biography: The Case of David Hume," in the Philosophical Review, LIX (1950), 184-201.

famous, is ill-founded. As Greig says, "We might as well charge him with forsaking literature for theory of knowledge."[1] Hume's interests were divided almost equally between "reasoning and philosophy" on one side and "poetry and polite literature" on the other.[2] If he had been forced to choose between literature (including history) and metaphysics (and allied branches of philosophy), Hume would likely have chosen literature; but we may feel sure his writings would have revealed a philosophic spirit.[3] The charge that he published his revolutionary ideas through a desire for notoriety or public notice at all costs is a misconception which

> . . . began with his contemporaries most of whom never read a chapter of the Treatise in their lives. It has been far too common since, not only among critics who have shown themselves antagonistic for religious reasons, but even among those sympathetic on the whole with Hume's philosophic point of view.[4]

If we turn to Hume's own statements about the desire for fame, an entirely different picture of his motives appears. In a letter to Henry Home he wrote:

> In looking over your Letters I find one of a twelvemonth's Date, wherein you desire me to send down a great many copys [of the Treatise] to Scotland. You propos'd no doubt to take the Pains of recommending them, & pushing the Sale. But to tell the Truth there is so little to be gain'd that way in such Works as these, that I wou'd not have you take the Trouble. If you know any body that is a Judge, you wou'd do me a sensible Pleasure in engaging him to a serious Perusal of the Book. Tis so rare to meet with one, that will take Pains on a Book, that does not come recommended by some great Name or Authority, that, I must confess, I am as fond of meeting with such a

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 67. [2]Letters, I, 13.

[3]Greig, op. cit., pp. 67-68. [4]Ibid., pp. 162-167.

> one, as if I were sure of his Approbation. I am, however, so doubtful in that particular, that I have endeavour'd all I cou'd to conceal my Name; tho' I believe I have not been so cautious in this respect as I ought to have been.[1]

There is certainly no indication of an inordinate interest in mere popularity here.

Some years later in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals Hume stated:

> By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others; which is the surest guardian of every virtue.
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> . . . And our regard to a character with others seems to arise only from a care of preserving a character with ourselves; and in order to attain this end, we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgment on the correspondent approbation of mankind.[2]

This seems an admirable reason for desiring public recognition, and there is no cause to doubt Hume's personal sincerity in it. In any event, he certainly did not forsake his philosophical principles, for the Essays contain numerous direct applications of prime theses from the neglected Treatise.

The essay is a form of literature which often is highly personal and revealing. This is certainly true in the case of David Hume; the Essays Moral and Political tend to reveal the man to us. In the words of one biographer:

> [The Essays] disclose in their author a radical opposition to ecclesiastical authority of every kind, and in particular, impugn the ethical, political and theological opinions commonly held by the Scottish clergy in his day. This does not appear only intermittently; it forms a sort of under-

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[1] New Letters, p. 4. [2] G.G., IV, 251.

current flowing through the book.[1]

This is an overstatement of the case apparently due to Greig's tendency to picture Hume as a total sceptic and infidel. While it is not to be denied that there are some rather pointed jabs at fanatical and zealous religionists,[2] the tone of the Essays is not as anti-religious as the above quotation would lead us to believe. Bishop Butler, it will be remembered, praised the Essays. Presumably, he regarded Hume's criticisms of religion as honest and well-founded. Actually, Hume at this time had very little reason to bear a grudge against the clergy. Later he began to entertain suspicions that the Treatise, even though deprived of its noble parts, was exciting opposition

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 121.

[2]"In all controversies, we find, without regarding the truth or falsehood on either side, that those who defend the established and popular opinions, are always the most dogmatical and imperious in their stile: while their adversaries affect almost extraordinary gentleness and moderation, in order to soften, as much as possible, any prejudices that may lye against them. Consider the behaviour of our free-thinkers of all denominations, whether they be such as decry all revelation, or only oppose the exorbitant power of the clergy; Collins, Tindal, Foster, Hoadley. Compare their moderation and good manners with the furious zeal and scurrility of their adversaries, and you will be convinced of the truth of my observation." [G. G., III, 118n.]

"Now, there has been a sudden and sensible change in the opinions of men within these last fifty years by the progress of learning and of liberty. Most people, in this island, have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority: The clergy have (entirely) lost their credit: Their pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and even religion can scarcely support itself in the world." [G. G., III, 125.] (In a later edition Hume altered "entirely" to "much.")

". . . we may observe that our ancestors, a few centuries ago, were sunk into the most abject superstition, last century they were inflamed with the most furious enthusiasm, and are now settled into the most cool indifference with regard to religious matters, that is to be found in any nation of the world." [G. G., III, 251.]

from churchmen. When unfortunate circumstances convinced him that this was the case,[1] Hume's enmity toward narrow-minded religionists became exceedingly uncompromising. But the real cause of this personal animosity did not appear until three years after the publication of the Essays at which time Hume experienced bitter disappointment as the direct result of the antagonism of clergymen.

The underlying motive of Hume's religious statements in the Essays appears to have been a desire to destroy superstition and dogmatic fanaticism and to establish a liberal philosophical religion. Two kinds of false and pernicious religions are discussed in the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm"; both are corruptions of true religion and are to be reprehended, but for different reasons. If one is forced to make a choice between the two, enthusiasm is the lesser evil.[2]

The severity with which Hume views superstition may be seen from the following reflections in the essay: Firstly, "Superstition is favourable to priestly power, and enthusiasm not less or rather more contrary to it, than sound reason and philosophy."[3] Secondly, "religions, which partake of enthusiasm

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[1] Infra, pp. 216-223.

[2] In Hume's day the term "enthusiasm" was employed in a hostile sense as "a misconceit of inspiration." It became a byeword applied in opprobrium and derision to all who laid claim to spiritual power or divine guidance and outstepped all the rightful bounds of reason. See Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878), I, 530-531.

[3] G. G., III, 145-146.

are, on their first rise, more furious and violent than those which partake of superstition; but in a little time become more gentle and moderate."[1] Thirdly, "superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it."[2] Superstition finds its sources in weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance. On the other hand, enthusiasm arises from hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance. One of the chief criticisms Hume makes of enthusiasm is that "being founded on strong spirits, and a presumptious boldness of character, it naturally begets the most extreme resolutions; especially after it rises to that height as to inspire the deluded fanatic with the opinion of divine illuminations, and with a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality, and prudence."[3] There is "nothing but philosophy able entirely to conquer these unaccountable terrors" which arise in superstitious and fanatical religions.[4]

Hume is particularly outspoken against the shortcomings of early Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. In the essay "Of Parties in General" he observes:

> . . . the Christian religion arising, while principles directly opposite to it were firmly established in the polite part of the world who despised the nation that first broached this novelty; no wonder, that, in such circumstances, it was but little countenanced by the civil magistrate, and that the priesthood was allowed to engross all the authority in the new sect. So bad a use did they make of this power in those early times, that the primitive persecutions may, perhaps, in part be ascribed to the violence instilled by them into their followers. And the same principles of priestly government continuing, after

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[1] G. G., III, 148.

[2] G. G., III, 149.

[3] G. G., III, 149.

[4] G. G., III, 147.

> Christianity became the established religion, they have engendered a spirit of persecution, which has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government. Such divisions, therefore, on the part of the people, may justly be esteemed factions of principle; but, on the part of the priests, who are the prime movers, they are really factions of interest.
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> . . . as philosophy was widely spread over the world, at the time when Christianity arose, the teachers of the new sect were obliged to form a system of speculative opinions; to divide, with some accuracy, their articles of faith; and to explain, comment, confute, and defend with all the subtilty of argument and science. Hence naturally arose keenness in dispute, when the Christian religion came to be split into new divisions and heresies: And this keenness assisted the priests in their policy of begetting a mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers. Sects of philosophy, in the ancient world, were more zealous than parties of religion; but in modern times parties of religion are more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition.[1]

In the essay "Of the Standard of Taste" Hume remarks:

> It is essential to the Roman Catholic religion to inspire a violent hatred of every other worship, and to represent all pagans, mahometans, and heretics as the objects of divine wrath and vengeance. Such sentiments, though they are in reality very blameable, are considered as virtues by the zealots of that communion. . . .[2]

Criticism of priests and clergymen in the Essays indicates an inability on the part of Hume to understand the thoughts and actions of religious individuals. He tends to make hasty generalizations from superficial observations,[3] and

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[1] G. G., III, 131-133. In a footnote Hume adds, ". . . we may entertain a suspicion, that those furious persecutions of Christianity [by the Romans] were in some measure owing to the imprudent zeal and bigotry of the first propagators of that sect; and Ecclesiastical history affords us many reasons to confirm this suspicion." [Ibid.]

[2] G. G., III, 284.

[3] "As to ecclesiastical parties; we may observe, that, in all ages of the world, priests have been enemies to liberty; and it is certain, that this steady conduct of theirs must have

regards all Christians as being bigoted and hypocritical. His judgment against ecclesiastics is only slightly mitigated when he notes "that all prudent men are on their guard, when they meet with any extraordinary appearance of religion; though at the same time, they confess, that there are many exceptions to this general rule, and that probity and superstition, or even probity and fanaticism, are not altogether and in every instance incompatible."[1] In the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume explains that he intends the term "priests" to mean "only the pretenders to power and dominion, and to a superior sanctity of character, distinct from virtue and good morals." He then observes that priests are "very different from clergymen, who are set apart by the laws, to the care of sacred matters, and to the conducting our public devotions with greater decency and order. There is no rank of men more to be respected than the latter."[2] Hume grants a limited value to the labors of a curate when he asserts: "Even the clergy, as their duty leads them to inculcate morality, may justly be thought, so far as regards this world, to have no other useful object of their institution."[3]

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been founded on fixed reasons of interest and ambition. Liberty of thinking, and of expressing our thoughts, is always fatal to priestly power, and to those pious frauds, on which it is commonly founded; and, by an infallible connexion which prevails among all kinds of liberty, this privilege can never be enjoyed, at least has never yet been enjoyed, but in a free government." [G. G., III, 135.]

In the essay "Of National Characters" Hume adds a long footnote dealing with the character of priests of all religions. He questions the sincerity of clergymen and regards their disposition as lacking amiableness. See infra, pp. 257-258.

[1]G. G., III, 246. [2]G. G., III, 147. [3]G. G., III, 114.

The essay "Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature" offers a vindication of the argument of Hutcheson against the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin. Hume advocates a view of human nature that closely conforms with the position held by the Moderate clergy in the Church of Scotland. The following paragraph is of particular interest in this respect:

> I am far from thinking, that all those, who have depreciated our species, have been enemies to virtue, and have exposed the frailties of their fellow creatures with any bad intentions. On the contrary, I am sensible that a delicate sense of morals, especially when attended with a splenetic temper, is apt to give a man a disgust of the world, and to make him consider the common course of human affairs with too much indignation. I must, however, be of the opinion, that the sentiments of those, who are inclined to think favourably of mankind, are more advantageous to virtue, than the contrary principles, which give us a mean opinion of our nature. When a man is prepossessed with a high notion of his rank and character in the creation, he will naturally endeavour to act up to it, and will scorn to do a base or vicious action, which might sink him below that figure which he makes in his own imagination. Accordingly we find, that all our polite and fashionable moralists insist upon this topic, and endeavour to represent vice as unworthy of man, as well as odious in itself.[1]

It was Hume's earnest desire to see a liberal system of opinions introduced into the churches,[2] but he believed that it was first of all necessary to deal superstition and fanaticism a death blow. This was evidently the aim of his statements on religion in the Essays.

Religious Revivals in Scotland

There were spectacular events in the ecclesiastical world that without doubt attracted Hume's attention and affected his attitude towards religion while he was preparing the Essays

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[1] G. G., III, 151.

[2] Supra, p. 197.

at Ninewells. In 1741 the great English evangelist George Whitefield came to Scotland on the invitation of the Seceders. He soon discovered that his friends were pure fanatics who felt they had a monopoly on Divine Grace. Whitefield considered church government a matter of indifference; the Seceders thought the presbyterian system divine and tried to force the Solemn League and Covenant on him. An open breach occurred when they demanded that the evangelist confine his ministrations to the members of the Associate Presbytery, because they alone were the "Lord's people"; his business, he told them, was rather with the devil's.[1] Whitefield visited Edinburgh where he associated with the Evangelicals within the Established Church and then began a thirteen week tour throughout Scotland.[2]

While in Edinburgh Whitefield preached in the open air in the Orphan Hospital Park on the west slope of Calton Hill. Large crowds came to hear him, and it appears that David Hume attended one of the meetings, for it is reported that he declared that it was worth going twenty miles to hear Whitefield preach. John Gillies in the Memoirs of Whitefield includes the name of David Hume in an assembly arranged by the Countess

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[1]John Gillies, Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield (Falkirk: W. Burns, 1798), p. 64. [Cf. Donald Fraser, Life and Diary of the Reverend Ralph Erskine (Edinburgh: William Oliphant & Son, 1834), pp. 287-336.]

[2]Whitefield's biographer states that he preached with great success in about thirty towns and villages. See Gillies, op. cit., pp. 67-86.

of Huntingdon.[1] Hume is said to have made the following comments on the preacher:

> Once after a solemn pause, he thus addressed his audience: "The attendant angel is just about to leave the threshold of this sanctuary, and ascend to heaven. And shall he ascend and not bear with him the news of one sinner amongst all this multitude reclaimed from the error of his way?" To give the greater effect to this exclamation, Whitefield stamped with his foot, lifted up his hands and eyes to heaven, and cried aloud, "Stop, Gabriel, stop, ere you enter the sacred portals, and yet carry with you the news of one sinner converted to God." This address was accompanied with such animation, yet natural action, that it surpassed anything I ever saw or heard in any other preacher.[2]

At the very least these reports indicate an interest in religious events on the part of Hume. He felt there was more to religious belief than met the eye and apparently endeavored to get at the root of the matter. But due to a lack of faith and devotion in his own life, Hume was unable to understand and sympathize with those individuals who talked about their spiritual experiences. He must certainly have been perplexed by the strange incidents which occurred soon after Whitefield left Scotland.

The Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals in 1742 came about as indirect results of Whitefield's first tour in Scotland and were the reason for his return. The meetings lasted for months

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[1] "It is also said, that David Hume, Esq; of Edinburgh, was a hearer of Mr. Whitefield's, and was much taken with his eloquence. Such testimonies are set down, not for their weight, but their singularity." [Ibid., p. 144n.]

[2] James Paterson Gledstone, George Whitefield M.A., Field-Preacher (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p. 247. [Cf. Luke Tyerman, The Live of the Rev. George Whitefield (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876-77), II, 210-211.]

and were attended by extraordinary scenes which doubtlessly caused Hume to wonder if Scotsmen could ever be satisfied with a sound philosophical religion. "Most of those who were 'awakened' by the terrors of the law gave vent to their agitation in cries and tears, and a considerable proportion, estimated at one in five, underwent the severest bodily as well as mental distress."[1] Some fainted, some went into convulsions or bled profusely at the nose, and others cried "that they saw hell opened for them and heard the shrieks of the damned. . . ."[2] Congregations wept, prayed and moaned, and the report of such excitement brought people from all sections of Scotland to Cambuslang, many of them continuing their devotions all night in the fields. The young were particularly affected by the religious fervor. "We read of children forsaking their sports to hold devotions in a barn; of schoolboys from eight to thirteen asking their master to let them 'sing psalms and pray' . .. ."[3] Little boys and girls were exhorted to "flee from the wrath to come," to "get a grip on Christ," and to sign the Covenant of Grace. Evangelical preachers came from great distances to assist in the meetings, and frequent communion services were held, attended by 30,000 to 40,000 people.[4]

The Seceders fiercely denounced the "Cambuslang Work" and George Whitefield as an irresponsible emissary of a gospel

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[1]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 266.

[2]Graham, Social Life, p. 356.

[3]Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 267.

[4]Ibid., p. 268.

that ignored the Covenants. He was stigmatized as a cheat, an imposter, an agent of the Devil. "On July 15, 1742, four days after the first communion at Cambuslang, [the Secederes] instituted a public fast for the satanic agency there manifested in 'bitter outcryings, faintings, severe bodily pains, convulsions, voices, visions, and revelations.' and for 'the fond reception' accorded to a priest of the Church of England who had sworn the oath of supremacy and abjured the Solemn League."[1] This bitter rivalry between two groups of zealous believers must have caught Hume's attention. Possibly, he sympathized with the English evangelist; for Whitefield, although an evangelical was not a fanatic. The historian William Law Mathieson considered Whitefield's ministry beneficial to the Church. "The process of enlightenment was continued by Whitefield; for the great preacher, whose Calvinism endeared him to the Evangelicals, and whose influence was responsible for the extraordinary scenes at Cambuslang, was not a Presbyterian, much less a Covenanter, but an Anglican priest; and it was a principal object of his mission to promote the vital principle of religion as 'a superiority to those grovelling prejudices which centre in externals.'"[2] Perhaps Hume agreed with the estimate of Whitefield and his work recorded in the Edinburgh Evening Courant:

> As he was frequently very explicit in opening the miseries of Popish tyranny and arbitrary power, and very warm in exhorting his hearers to loyalty and courage at home, and

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, pp. 228-229.

> in stirring them up to pray for the success of his Majesty's forces both by sea and land abroad, we have reason to believe that his visit at this juncture has been particularly useful.[1]

Acquaintance with a Liberal Theologian

Towards the close of the same year in which the religious revivals occurred in Scotland Hume corresponded with William Mure, who apparently tried to lead him to accept orthodox religious principles. Hume jokingly refers to Mure as "My Disciple in Religion & Morals" and asks why he should not be so in politics. Hume continues in an ironical tone saying, "I entreat you to get the Bill about Witches repeal'd, & to move for some new Bill to secure the Christian Religion, by burning Deists, Socinians, Moralists, & Hutchinsonians."[2] This is a reference to the repeal in 1736 of a law which formerly made witchcraft a capital offence. It was, of course, pleasing to Hume to see these signs of a growing enlightenment, and he took this opportunity of ridiculing the narrow-minded Seceders who regarded such actions as evidence of infidelity in the Church and the nation.

In his reply, Mure recommended that Hume read certain "Dialogues on Devotion" and sent a copy of William Leechman's celebrated sermon on prayer.[3] As a close friend of Hutcheson,

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[1] Quoted in the Scots Magazine XVIII (1756), 464-65.

[2] Letters, I, 44.

[3] Leechman had been a pupil of Hamilton of Edinburgh and Hutcheson of Glasgow and through the influence of the latter secured a chair at Glasgow University in 1743. Ramsay of Ochtertye regarded Leechman as an instrument of a "memorable

Leechman shared in the new and enlightened spirit which was gaining influence among the Scottish clergy. A party in the Church opposed his admittance as a member of the Glasgow Presbytery, and he was charged with heretical opinions promulgated in a pamphlet entitled "On the Nature, Reasonableness, and Advantages of Prayer." In this pamphlet Leechman had condensed the substance of a course of sermons on prayer. The principal objection to his presentation was that he did not refer to the merits and intercession of Christ "as the sole ground of our acceptance with God in prayer" and that he taught "Christians to look for pardon and acceptance on other grounds than this."[1] Leechman's defence was that he had used only such arguments for prayer as were calculated to meet the objections of a certain infidel tract which maintained the uselessness of prayer as absurd and unreasonable and a profane attempt to interfere with the established laws of nature. He declared that his pamphlet dealt with only one phase of the doctrine, i.e., that prayer was alike consistent with the

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revolution" and stated that as a liberal teacher of theology he sought to educate, not to convince, delivering "no dictatorial opinion, no infallible or decisive judgment." [Ramsay of Ochtertye, op. cit., I, 279-85.] Leechman was more a moralist than a theologian but added to Francis Hutcheson's "sense of terrestrial beneficience a vivid anticipation of celestial bliss." [Mathieson, Scotland and the Union, p. 255.] According to his biographer, William Leechman was a man who united settled religious principles with a calm conscientious inquiring mind; he had too much respect for truth to hate or contemn a man who was led to opposite opinions by purely metaphysical inquiries. [James Wodrow, "Account of William Leechman's Life and of His Lectures," prefixed to Leechman's Sermons (London: T. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1789), I, 34.]

[1]James Wodrow, op. cit., p. 23.

dictates of reason and the precepts of Scripture. The fact that he had not emphasized the "Name" in which prayer was to be offered in no way demonstrated, as his opponents had alleged, that Leechman's views on that particular point were heterodox. At any rate, charges were dismissed by the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr,[1] a decision hailed by Leechman's students at the University as the defeat of the over-zealous and the triumph of the liberals.

From the general tenor of a letter from Hume to William Mure it appears that Leechman was seeking suggestions on the preparation of a second edition of the sermon. Leechman had evidently met Hume at the home of the Mure's of Caldwell, where the professor had been William Mure's tutor around the year 1727. Leechman, Hume's senior by five years, was one of the earliest Moderate theologians with whom the philosopher formed a friendship. A mutual esteem developed between them, although Leechman opposed Hume's heretical opinions by warning his students in a sermon of 1764 against Voltaire, Rousseau, Bolingbroke, and Hume, whom he distinguished as "the most celebrated men in some species of writing that are perhaps in Europe at present."[2]

Hume regarded Leechman's sermon as "a very good one"; but, following Plato's discussion of atheism, he considered the argument as manifesting the type of atheism which asserts

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[1]Morren, op. cit., I, 46-61.

[2]William Leechman, Sermons, ed. by James Wodrow (London: T. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1789), II, 185.

that the Deity is influenced by prayers or sacrifices.[1] After offering some advice on the style and composition, he criticized the substance of the sermon. Hume's remarks here are revelatory of his own attitude towards religion. He objects to "Devotion & Prayer, & indeed to every thing we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality, & the Assent of the Understanding to the Proposition that God exists."[2]

> It must be acknowledg'd that Nature has given us a strong passion of Admiration for whatever is excellent, & of Love & Gratitude for whatever is benevolent & beneficial, & that the Deity possesses these Attributes in the highest Perfection & yet I assert he is not the natural Object of any Passion or Affection. He is no Object either of the Senses or Imagination, & very little of the Understanding, without which it is impossible to excite any Affection. . . . A man . . . may have his Heart perfectly well disposed towards every proper & natural Object of Affection, Friends, Benefactors, Countrey, Children &c, & yet from this Circumstance of the Invisibility & Incomprehensibility of the Deity may feel no Affection towards him. And indeed I am afraid, that all Enthusiasts mightily deceive themselves. Hope & Fear perhaps agitate their Breast when they think of the Deity: Or they degrade him into a Resemblance with themselves, & by that means render him more comprehensible. Or they exult with Vanity in esteeming themselves his peculiar Favourites. Or at best they are actuated by a forc'd & strain'd Affection, which moves by Starts & Bounds, & with a very irregular disorderly Pace. Such an Affection can never be requir'd of any Man as his Duty.[3]

Prayer must be excluded from religion because it has no influence on God and is merely a kind of rhetorical figure which can never be a duty. Such a figure is ultimately dangerous and "leads directly & even unavoidably to Impiety & Blasphemy."

> Tis a natural Infirmity of Men to imagine, that their Prayers have a direct influence, & this Infirmity must be extremely foster'd & encouraged by the constant Use of

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[1] Letters, I, 50. [2] Letters, I, 50. [3] Letters, I, 51.

> Prayer. Thus all wise Men have excluded the Use of Images & Pictures in Prayer; tho they certainly enliven Devotion; because til found by Experience, that with the vulgar these visible Representations draw too much towards them, & become the only Objects of Devotion.[1]

This discussion exemplifies Hume's lack of personal religious devotion, but the fact that he was willing to discuss the topic of devotion and prayer indicates that he desired to examine all the arguments and evidence in support of that side of religion which he was unable to accept. Hume scrutinized the orthodox position; and in some respects it appears that his own sceptical views were advanced in order to call forth the opponent's arguments. He was earnestly endeavoring to arrive at truth in the religious sphere.

Academic Disappointment

In the year 1742 Dr. John Pringle, Professor of Moral and Pneumatic Philosophy[2] at the University of Edinburgh, was appointed physician to the Earl of Stair, commander of the British troops in the Low Countries. Contemplating a vacancy, David Hume decided to try to secure his own appointment to the chair. But he soon experienced the intolerance of the ecclesiastical world, and the unfortunate candidature became a crucial affair in the formation of his anti-clerical zeal.[3]

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[1] Letters, I, 52.

[2] Pneumatics dealt with such questions as "the being and perfections of the one true God, the nature of Angels and the soul of man, and the duties of Natural religion." [Grant, op. cit., II, 336.]

[3] Mossner suggests that Hume should have recalled what he had written Hutcheson in 1739: "Except a Man be in Orders, or be immediately concern'd in the Instruction of Youth, I do

The Lord Provost, John Coutts, mentioned Hume's name to several members of the Town Council, many of whom knew David Hume and liked him. If the vacancy had been filled immediately, the position would likely have gone to him; however, Pringle was seemingly not ready to resign but hoped to obtain another year's absence. Consequently, correspondence back and forth between Pringle and the Town Council delayed a final decision, all of which proved fatal to Hume's chances. The Scottish clergy became alarmed when they heard that Hume was seeking the position; they believed his philosophy to be opposed to orthodoxy and charges of infidelity were brought against him. Hume's principles were said to be atheistic or at least deistic and naturally he was ill-qualified to teach morals and the philosophy of the soul to the youth of a Christian country, to young men who would become pastors of the Kirk of Scotland.

Continued postponements and loss of the influence of Coutts and of his successor, Archibald Stewart, made possible a strengthening of the opposition to Hume. Writing to William Mure in August, 1744, Hume informs him about the situation and says, "the accusation of Heresy, Deism, Scepticism, Atheism, &c, &c, &c. was started against me; but never took, being bore down by the contrary Authority of all the good Company in town."[1] It appears that even the Moderates concurred with

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not think his Character depends upon his philosophical Speculations, as the World is now model'd. . . ." [Letters, I, 34.] [See Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 153.]

[1]Letters, I, 57-58.

these charges against Hume. He was deeply hurt when he heard that Francis Hutcheson and William Leechman had been asked for their opinion and had given it against him:

> . . . what surprizd me extremely was to find that this Accusation was supported by the pretended Authority of Mr Hutcheson & even Mr Leechman, who, tis said, agreed that I was a very unfit Person for such an Office. This appears to be absolutely incredible, especially with regard to the latter Gentleman. For as to Mr Hutcheson, all my Friends think, that he has been rendering me bad Offices to the utmost of his Power. . . . Mr Couts now speaks of that Professor rather as my Enemy than as my Friend. What can be the meaning of this Conduct in that celebrated & benevolent Moralist, I cannot imagine. I shall be glad to find, for the Honour of Philosophy, that I am mistaken; & indeed, I hope so too: and beg of you to enquire a little into the Matter, but very cautiously, lest I make him my open & profess'd Enemy, which I woud willingly avoid.[1]

Hume states that he is not certain whether Hutcheson "really entertains a bad Opinion of my Orthodoxy, or is only unwilling that I should be Professor of Ethics in Edinburgh; lest that Town being in the Neighbourhood of Glasgow, shou'd spread its Contagion all around it, & even infect the Students of the latter University."[2]

A rather perplexing question arises concerning Hume's conception of his own religious views. It is evident that he regarded himself as a suitable candidate for a university chair in which he would be required to instruct the youth on religious matters--pneumatics. Yet we have seen in the Essays that he did not countenance superstition and fanaticism and regarded the chief duty of the clergy to be an inculcation of morality. At this time Hume had not explicitly stated his

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[1]Letters, I, 58. [2]Letters, I, 58.

personal theological position; possibly, the question had not been entirely settled in his thinking. He had written to Hutcheson that it was his desire to see liberal principles introduced into the churches. Perhaps, Hume felt he could contribute to an ecclesiastical enlightenment by entering the university, even though he had not taken a definite stand concerning spiritual problems. He evidently did not consider the accusations of infidelity to be valid, otherwise it seems likely he would not have attempted to procure a position which required him to make statements of religious significance.

In a letter to Matthew Sharpe of Hoddam, Hume requests him to persuade Lord Tinwald to bring influence to bear upon the members of the Town Council. This was in April, 1745, and Hume informs Sharpe "that such a popular Clamour has been raisd against me in Edinburgh, on account of Scepticism, Heterodoxy & other hard Names, which confound the ignorant, that my Friends find some Difficulty, in working out the Point of my Professorship, which once appear'd so easy."[1] Hume then suggests: "Did I need a Testimonial for my Orthodoxy I shoud certainly appeal to you."[2] In the meantime, the Council had elected Francis Hutcheson to the position. The leading ministers of the City, in response to a request for their "avisamentum"or advice, declared themselves well pleased. Hutcheson, however, declined and another "avisamentum" was sought. Hume tells Sharpe, "There is no Time to lose . . . . A word to the Wise."[3] All this delay had given the "Popular"

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[1]Letters, I, 59. [2]Letters, I, 59. [3]Letters, I, 60.

or Evangelical Party time to muster their forces and the ministers advised against the election of David Hume. Even William Wishart,[1] the Edinburgh Principal, decided against Hume and determined that he must be kept out of the chair. The precise charge made by Wishart against Hume is not known but it was based upon the teaching of the Treatise. Hume described the attack of the principal in a letter to Henry Home:

> The Principal found himself reduc'd to this Dilemma; either to draw heresies from my Principles by Inferences & Deductions, which he knew wou'd never do with the Ministers & Town Council. Or if he made use of my Words, he must pervert them & misrepresent them in the grossest way in the World. This last Expedient he chose, with much Prudence but very little Honesty.[2]

When he heard of Principal Wishart's charge and of the minister's "avisamentum," Hume "hastily compos'd" a letter to Coutts, for the charge, in Hume's own words, was "so weak, that it did not require much time to answer it, if the Matter had been to be judg'd by Reason."[3] This letter of self-defence which he "scarce had time to revise" was put into print by Henry Home.[4] But even "this last frantic effort on the

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[1] Wishart was the son of the elder William Wishart, Principal of the University during Hume's student days. He had been Professor of Divinity and in 1737 was elected Principal.

[2] New Letters, p. 15. Writing after the affair was settled, Hume informs Sir James Johnstone of Westerhall that "unluckily before my friends in Edinburgh could be inform'd of my resolutions [to continue as a tutor to the Marquis of Annandale], the matter was brought to an issue, and by the cabals of the Principal, the bigotry of the clergy, and the credulity of the mob, we lost it." [Letters, I, 61-62.]

[3] New Letters, p. 15.

[4] It was announced in both the Caledonian Mercury and the Edinburgh Evening Courant for May 21, 1745. Mossner

part of Hume's friends to stem the rising tide against his candidacy"[1] was all in vain. Enough opposition was raised by the inquisitorial zeal of the Evangelicals and Wishart to keep him out; the power of the city ministers was effectual and his application was ignored. The vacancy was filled on the 5th of June 1745 by the appointment of Mr. William Cleghorn, who had acted for Pringle in his absence.[2]

The early biographer of Hume, T. E. Ritchie, makes the following comments on the whole affair:

> The interest of Hume's friends proved unsuccessful: his philosophical opinions were misrepresented, his character was traduced, and so great an outcry raised by the religious zealots as to endanger his personal safety. The clergy were particularly active on this occasion, some of whom represented Mr. Hume's principles to be those of an atheist, while others charitably branded them as the dogmas of deism. Their remonstrances succeeded; but the event gave rise to a rooted antipathy on the part of Hume towards the Scottish clergy. . . .[3]

Ritchie apparently agreed with the opponents of Hume for he states: "From the observations of the philosophical and ethical writings of [Hume] . . . the reader, who bears in his recollection that Hume's reputation rested as yet on these only, will, perhaps, join with us in thinking that the university

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suggests that this pamphlet, which has never been located, "may well constitute an important document in the further interpretation of some aspects of the Treatise." [Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 160.]

[1] Ibid.

[2] For further details of the proceedings concerning Hume's candidature, see Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 154-162.

[3] T. E. Ritchie, An Account of the Life and Writings of David Hume (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), p. 49.

was no loser by the issue of the contest."[1]

Thus the most able Scottish philosopher of the time was frustrated in his attempt to enter a field of activity for which he, perhaps rightly, deemed himself suitable. From the time of this event, Hume, as was only natural, developed a strong antipathy to the generality of the Scottish clergymen. The grounds upon which he had been rejected as a professor were such as to create a bitterness that continued throughout the rest of his life. This animosity was lessened, it is true, as a result of his intimate friendships with the Moderates almost ten years later, but he could never bring himself to evaluate fairly the thought and activities of any member of an enthusiastic or evangelical religion.

It was probably an impropriety on Hume's part to think of becoming, in Huxley's terms, "a presbyterian teacher of presbyterian youth,"[2] especially in view of the power of the Church in educational matters. The religious spirit of Hume's countrymen was not yet at a point where the general tenor of his writings could be sympathized with or even understood in their true light. The fanaticism of that time was unwilling to tolerate in an orthodox chair a voice so uncertain as his upon theological questions confronting the Church in days of transition. And even if the charges of infidelity, atheism, and deism were false, as we believe they were, Hume had not in fact presented the positive theological doctrines which followed logically from his basic philosophical principles.

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[1] Ibid. [2] Huxley, op. cit., p. 27.

He had so far been strangely silent as to what his religious beliefs actually were. The instance of the Edinburgh professorship forcibly impressed upon Hume's mind the necessity of stating his thoughts concerning religion.[1]

Resumé

Hume's first literary production, the Treatise of Human Nature, met with a disappointing reception and the new method of thought failed to arouse the public interest anticipated by its originator. Certain theological speculations were deleted for fear that religious people would misunderstand or be offended by such thoughts. Yet, the Treatise was the chief cause of Hume's thwarted attempt to obtain a much desired position in the university. The primary criticism against him was seemingly based on the fact that he failed to declare his own religious views; consequently, his opponents were able to claim that he was an atheist or infidel. In the Essays Hume ventured to criticize the types of religion which he regarded as detrimental to mankind, but again he neglected to state explicitly the theological position he intended to substitute for these pernicious systems. That problems of religion held a place of interest in Hume's mind is evinced from

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[1]The university affair also indicated that the Treatise was not strictly dead. The reputation of the book, as Mossner states, "was such as to brand the author as unfit to teach the young. Ill-fated work that it was, The Treatise not only failed to catch the attention of thinkers capable of dealing with its ideas, but was beginning to be read by those who could not understand it, yet could make personal trouble for the author. Little wonder that Hume's feelings against the Treatise, which were already strong, became intensified to such a degree that, after rewriting some sections of it, he ultimately disowned it publicly." [Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 161]

the fact that the topic of miracles occupied his thinking while in France, from his statements about George Whitefield, and from his correspondence with William Leechman on the subject of devotion and prayer. The disappointment of his hopes for the Edinburgh Professorship together with the poor reception of the Treatise convinced Hume that it would be necessary to clarify his ideas on religious matters; his views would have to be presented to the general public. In the next chapter we shall discuss Hume's attempts to elucidate the religious standpoint which, he felt, might be derived logically from his basic philosophical principles.

CHAPTER V

DAVID HUME - MAN OF LETTERS, 1745-1757

Introduction

In this chapter of our study we shall examine David Hume's attitude towards religion as it is expressed in his life and works after 1745. It is necessary to notice the influence of certain events in this period of Hume's life if we expect to interpret properly his attitude towards religious belief. As a man of letters he took all knowledge as his province and sought to revolutionize the study of human nature. The prime motivation of his life was the overturning of the rationalistic tradition in order to make way for the new science of man. Hume went against the common current of thought and sought to bring about an intellectual revolution. His opposition to traditional views was most conspicuous when he applied his technique to theology. The establishment of a new basis for religion was involved in his criticisms; consequently, it was on that subject that he was most often attacked. The numerous answers to him which appeared in his lifetime bear no evidence at all that the general purpose of his work was understood; certainly the design of his arguments in the religious sphere was not comprehended by his contemporaries as we shall see in the ensuing pages.

The Death of Katherine Home

In the year 1745 Hume accepted an engagement to act as tutor to the Marquis of Annandale. The unfortunate outcome of this association need not concern us here, but another event, which took place in this period, profoundly influenced David Hume. That was the death of his mother.[1] After Hume's own death, stories were circulated by some pious zealots concerning his reactions to the death of Katherine Home. These tales tended to malign his character, and the episode was exploited to his disadvantage by his adversaries.[2] One story by an American traveler reported that after Hume turned from the religious education received from his mother to a confirmed infidelity, he "applied himself with unwearied, and unhappily with successful efforts, to sap the foundation of his mother's faith." The report continues:

> Having succeeded in this dreadful work, he went abroad into foreign countries; and as he was returning, an express

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[1]The exact date of Katherine Home's death is unknown, but a letter to Henry Home indicates that it was before June 15, 1745: "I receive very melancholy Letters from my Brother, which afflict me very much. My Mother's Death, which makes such an immense void in our Family, along with my absence, & his Disappointment in Love, sink him I find very much." [New Letters, p. 17.] Hume's biographers have incorrectly dated his mother's death in 1748 or 1749 because of a misleading statement in "My Own Life": "I went down in 1749 and lived two years with my Brother at his Country house: For my Mother was now dead." [Letters, I, 3.] See Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 173-174.

[2]See Robert Chambers, A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1854), Article on "Hume," V, 102-133.

> met him in London, with a letter from his mother, informing him that she was in a deep decline, and could not long survive: she said, she found herself without any support for her distress; that he had taken away that source of comfort, upon which, in all cases of affliction, she used to rely, and that now she found her mind sinking into despair. She did not doubt but her son would afford her some substitute for her religion; and she conjured him to hasten to her, or at least to send her a letter, containing such consolations as philosophy can afford to a dying mortal. Hume was overwhelmed with anguish on receiving this letter, and hastened to Scotland, travelling day and night; but before he arrived his mother expired. No permanent impression seems, however, to have been made on his mind by this most trying event; and whatever remorse he might have felt at the moment, he soon relapsed into his wonted obduracy of heart.[1]

Burton regards this story as "totally at variance with Hume's character."[2] David Hume was not one to deprive a fellow creature of a faith in Christianity. He was accepted by religious individuals who never had to fear that he would maliciously undertake to change their sentiments.[3] The above account was the cause of a remonstrance from Hume's nephew, Baron David Hume.[4] The younger Hume quotes from the manuscript memoirs of Alexander Carlyle[5] the story of Hume's reactions to his mother's death as related by the Honorable Patrick Boyle. Mossner states

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[1] "Silliman's Travels," quoted in Burton, op. cit., I, 292.

[2] Ibid., I, 293. See also: Ibid., II, 438-441.

[3] "The philosophers of Scotland have no nostrums. They tell what they know, and deliver their sentiments without disguise or reserve. This generous feature was conspicuous in the character of Mr. Hume. He insulted no man, but, when the conversation turned upon particular subjects whether moral or religious, he expressed his genuine sentiments with freedom, with force, and with a dignity which did honour to human nature." [William Smellie, Literary and Characteristical Lives of Gregory, Kames, Hume, and Smith (Edinburgh, 1800), p.162.]

[4] Quarterly Review, XVI, 279.

[5] See supra, pp. 106-107.

that this report "bears every evidence of the truth and was indeed accepted as fact by the philosopher's nephew."[1] We can well imagine the deep remorse and self-accusation of a devoted son for being absent during his mother's time of need; he was indeed overcome with grief. It is not entirely impossible that he even repented of having grieved a Christian mother by his supposed infidelity. But it is certainly improbable that Hume's reply was an indication that his doubts were insincere and that he had thrown them out merely "to entertain and employ the learned and metaphysical world." Hume had always raised questions for the expressed purpose of arriving at truth and not merely for the purpose of confusing his antagonists.

Boyle and Carlyle persuaded themselves that Hume was a good Christian at heart. Mossner declares that such a position will not do and presents the following argument against it:

> David Hume had long since renounced the Christianity of revelation and acknowledged "the character of an infidel." That he retained the characteristics of a good and moral nature is no evidence to the contrary, nor is his remark [to Patrick Boyle], presuming that it has been faithfully reported. Supernaturalism Hume rejected along with the philosophy implicit in what he termed "the religious hypothesis," yet social and family ties always remained strong, and, above all, devotion to his mother.[2]

In the three years following the death of his mother, Hume participated in military and diplomatic missions, but his spare time was spent in the revision of the principles contained in the unfortunate Treatise. He continued to read, study and speculate, but intellectual activities did not dominate his

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 173.

[2]Ibid., p. 174.

mind. For six years he had published nothing except a short pamphlet. The occasion of this tract was the unfortunate trial of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Archibald Stewart, who was charged with neglect of duty in allowing the Young Pretender to gain control of the city in the Rebellion of 1745. Hume came to Stewart's defense and turned pamphleteer on his behalf. The main section of the paper, which is relatively unimportant, is dated October 20, 1747; the postscript, added after the verdict of not guilty had been returned, is dated November 4. This postscript is valuable in furnishing further indications of Hume's views regarding religious enthusiasts. He writes:

> . . . I shall further explain to you the great Difference betwixt a political and a religious Whig. . . . The Idea I form of a political Whig is, that of a Man of Sense and Moderation, a Lover of Laws and Liberty, whose chief Regard to particular Princes and Families, is founded on a Regard to the publick Good: The Leaders of this Party amongst us, are Men of great Worth. . . .
>
> The religious Whigs are a very different Set of Mortals, and in my Opinion, are much worse than the religious Tories: as the political Tories are inferior to the political Whigs. I know not how it happens, but it seems to me, that a Zeal for Bishops, and for the Book of Common-Prayer, tho' equally groundless, has never been able, when mixt up with Party Notions, to form so virulent and exalted a Poison in human Breasts, as the opposite Principles. Dissimulation, Hypocrisy, Violence, Calumny, Selfishness are, generally speaking, the true and legitimate Offspring of this kind of Zeal.[1]

Hume had good reason for his violent dislike of religious enthusiasts. He had experienced this kind of zeal against himself in the affair of the Edinburgh professorship. It seems the

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[1] [David Hume], A True Account of the Behaviour and Conduct of Archibald Stewart, Esq; Late Lord Provost of Edinburgh, In a Letter to A Friend (London: M. Cooper, 1748), pp. 48-50.

remembrance of that event now served to barb his pen against religious enthusiasm.

Publication of the First Enquiry

Between 1742 and 1748 Hume slowly rewrote Book I of the Treatise. Without abandoning the principles on which it rested, he cut out long passages and reworded the whole in a lighter style. He was willing to admit that he had been too ambitious in attempting to present an entirely new system of philosophy. With his change of attitude there also came a change of title--the term "treatise" sounded much too final, self-assured and pretentious. Hoping to please the public, Hume gave his work the tentative and modest title--Philosophical Essays Concerning the Human Understanding.[1] He had worked several years on the revision and had discussed the arguments of the book with Henry Home, who strongly urged against its publication.[2] Home presumably felt it was better to leave the Treatise in oblivion rather than to excite fresh hostility from clergymen and philosophers. Hume did not take his friend's advice[3] but went ahead with the publication of the first instalment of his design to recast the Treatise book by book.

Discussions on two new subjects are introduced in the

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[1]The title was changed in 1758 to An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding.

[2]Letters, I, 106.

[3]Hume wrote: "In the first place, I think I am too deep engaged to think of a retreat. In the second place, I see not what bad consequences follow, in the present age, from the character of an infidel; especially if a man's conduct be in other respects irreproachable." [Ibid.]

Enquiry. It was on this occasion that Hume promulgated his opinions on miracles, which he had not been bold enough to publish in the Treatise. The other new topic added was entitled "Practical Consequences of Natural Religion," the title being changed in the 1751 edition to "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State." Hume had been considering the question of miracles for quite some time; he was interested in the problem while living in France from 1734 to 1737. Now he felt the time had come for him to state his case.

Hume has often been severely criticized because of the famous essay "On Miracles," which brought its author a troublesome notoriety. The passage infuriated every section of theological opinion from Roman Catholicism to Scottish Presbyterianism.[1] Hume became a scandal to the orthodox; he was attacked, denounced and vilified, and his name became anathema. As Greig states, the essay "provoked so much hostility that both friends and foes of David Hume have granted it an unbecoming prominence."[2] John Wesley in his Journal described it as "an insolent book." James Somerville wrote: "Hume's metaphysics would readily excite that suspicion of sophistry which naturally arises in every mind acquainted with his inveterate enmity to religion."[3] T. H. Huxley asserted that by this

[1]By 1761 all Hume's works were placed on the index of prohibited books of the Roman Catholic Church. Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Rome, 1911), p. 160; "Hume, David. Opera omnia. Decr. 19ian. 1761; 10 Sept 1827." [Cited by Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 228.]

[2]Greig, op. cit., p. 162.

[3]James Somerville, Remarks on an Article in the "Edinburgh

essay on miracles Hume lost "the crown he might have won" because of his "craving after mere notoriety and vulgar success."[1] L. A. Selby-Bigge described the sections on theology added in the Enquiry as superfluous and judged them to be a bold bid on Hume's part to "attract attention, and excite that 'murmur among the zealots' by which the author desired to be distinguished."[2] These judgments carry little weight, however, when we recall that the essay on miracles was originally written for the Treatise. The argument was considered by Hume as a part of his new system of philosophy. But the essay was one of the "nobler parts" cut off to avoid giving "too much offense" to the godly.

A. E. Taylor's condemnation of the essay[3] has been severely criticized and refuted by Greig. In Taylor's examination the essay is considered as crammed with fallacies, as superfluous within its setting, and as inconsistent with Hume's general position. The only motive Hume could possibly have had for publication, Taylor claims, was "a simple craving for notoriety at any cost."[4] The motive of anti-clerical zeal (which is Greig's interpretation) is dismissed in the following words: "It is certain as anything in biography can be that

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Review," in Which the Doctrine of Hume on Miracles is Maintained (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh & Innes, 1815), p. 27.

[1]Huxley, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

[2]Selby-Bigge, op. cit., p. xii.

[3]A. E. Taylor, David Hume and the Miraculous (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927).

[4]Taylor, op. cit., p. 3.

Hume was, in point of fact, no anti-clerical zealot, but an amiable and easy-going man of the world whose chosen social circle consisted largely of the 'Moderates' among the Edinburgh Presbyterians."[1] Greig demonstrates that this statement is misleading:

> It arises from Professor Taylor's bland indifference to chronology--a matter of first importance to biographers.
>
> The essay "Of Miracles" . . . was intended for the Treatise; we may therefore date the first draft of it about the year 1736. And it lay about in manuscript until the year 1747, when it went to print.
>
> Neither in 1736 nor in 1747, nor indeed at any date before 1752 at the earliest, had Hume any dealings that we hear of with "the Moderates among the Edinburgh Presbyterians." His intimacy with them did not start till 1753 or thereabouts; he offended several of them by the very obvious "anti-clerical zeal" animating the first volume of his history (1754); and as late at 1761 he was compelled to make it plain to Hugh Blair, one of his "chosen circle," that religious topics of discussion must in the future be forborne between them, since agreement was impossible. In short, in any search after the motives that induced Hume to print "Of Miracles" in 1748, his friendship with a group of Edinburgh Moderates after 1753 proves exactly nothing.[2]

It may have been that Hume was actually suffering from a prejudice against the churches and the clergy. If so, it was only the natural reaction of a man who had been ill-treated by the Edinburgh ministers in the matter of the professorial position at the University. He had displayed caution and constraint in the publication of the Treatise but seemingly to no avail. Now he was no longer willing to make his publications conform to the standards of narrow-minded bigots.[3] The "nobler parts" of his works were not

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[1] Ibid., p. 2. [2] Greig, op. cit., p. 163.

[3] Greig believes Hume wished "to shock and scandalize his old antagonists, the clergy, the enthusiasts, and the superstitioners of all kinds." [Ibid., p. 167.]

to be suppressed merely to please men who lacked the ability to understand his argument. Hume, no doubt, was fully aware that the essay "Of Miracles" was provocative and that its publication would be dangerous to him. It is not impossible that he entertained the hope that the essay would catch the public eye, for the subject of miracles was certainly very much in the air at this time. The Deistic controversy had brought the question into vogue.[1] Perhaps Hume perceived the question of miracles to be the real issue between the theologians and the scientists and felt intellectually bound to advance his ideas on the subject. Whatever Hume's real motive for inserting the sections on theology may have been, the arguments, instead of being irrelevant, fit in with Hume's general point of view and are useful in pointing to the main theme of the Enquiry. It might just as validly be argued that their publication points to Hume's intellectual honesty which led him to present what he considered to be a truth established by clear and cogent thinking regardless of the consequences. If this is the case, Hume demonstrated remarkable courage in publishing the essays even while he foresaw a possible injury to himself.

The substance of Hume's professedly "decisive" argument against miracles is "that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it

[1]Hume complained that the ferment occasioned by Dr. Conyers Middleton's Free Enquiry, which dealt with the miraculous powers claimed to inhere in the Church, ruined his own sales. [See Letters, I, 3.]

endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior."[1] The merits and defects of Hume's reasoning have received ample treatment by both friends and foes, and we need not go into them here. It will be our concern to analyze how the essay fits into the over-all scheme of Hume's thought in the Enquiry. By so doing, we believe his attitude towards religion will become more evident.

In the conclusion of the Enquiry Hume reviews the basic principles of "mitigated scepticism or academical philosophy."[2] He claims that the certainty of demonstration is limited to the pure realm of idea (i.e., the sciences of logic and mathematics). All other sciences concerning matter of fact or existence, which are based upon arguments from cause or effect, are reduced to probability.

It appears that Hume's problem was one of finding a way out of scepticism while admitting fully the validity of the sceptical arguments. In the Treatise he had selected from various writers, for the purpose of refutation, arguments which were of a rational or dogmatic kind. He then stated the sceptical argument to destroy these views before presenting the opinions which gave support to his own constructive argument. In the Enquiry scepticism provides him with the weapon for attack on Deism, which regarded religion as having its origin in reason and the consciousness of duty.

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[1] E, 115-116. [2] E, 161-165.

For Hume religion might correspond to reason or contradict it, but not proceed from it. At the end of the essay on miracles he explicitly rejects the Deistic position in the following words:

> . . . I think it [Bacon's method of reasoning] may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure.[1]

> . . . upon the whole, we may conclude, that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.[2]

These quotations may be interpreted as ironical or mocking deference to current theology but they certainly arrest our attention nevertheless. They suggest possibilities of thought beyond the regular operations of the intellect which the rationalist and dogmatic philosophers had been analyzing. The same effect is suggested by a footnote in the concluding section of the Enquiry. In referring to experience as that "which teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another," Hume states:

> That impious maxim of the ancient philosophy, Ex nihilo, nihil fit, by which the creation of matter was excluded ceases to be a maxim, according to this philosophy. Not, only the will of the supreme Being may create matter; but for ought we know a priori, the will of any other being might create it, or any other cause, that the most whimsical imagination can assign.[3]

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[1] E, 129-130. [2] E, 131. [3] E, 164n.

There is something startling in Hume's declaration that

> Divinity or theology, as it proves the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of souls, is composed partly of reasonings concerning particular, partly concerning general facts. It has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.[1]

These remarks about religion have often been regarded as exaggerated or insincere. Even if this indictment be true, our attention is attracted and our minds are opened to the opportunities for further research and knowledge based on such a philosophical view. Hume's sole purpose may have been simply to point out these possibilities. That he had a serious meaning in making these statements is indicated by the fact that he was personally concerned with the question whether a Divine Being is the cause of the order of nature or nature is the cause of itself and is the ultimate reality for us. That he recognized the existence of religious thought and honestly inquired into its nature and value cannot be denied. There is no apparent reason to question Hume's sincerity in attacking the religious hypothesis of the Deist whatever we may regard his personal thoughts on religion to have been.

At the time Hume composed his Treatise, the Deistic controversy was in full tide. Some thinkers were attempting to formulate a reasonable creed which did not depend upon any accidents of time, place or circumstances. The subject of miracles, along with prophecy, was the vantage ground of the more outspoken Deists. Following the doctrine that Christianity

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[1]E, 165.

is essentially reasonable, they proceeded to eliminate miracles and revelation, and to reduce Christianity to belief in God and a few broad principles common to all religions.[1] There were many debates about the irreducible articles of Christian belief; the disputants claimed to base their arguments on authority and made their appeal to reason. The Deists insisted upon the reasonableness of religion and upon the necessity and possibility of establishing it on rational grounds. On the other hand, the opponents of Deism, who were still anxious to defend religious doctrines by means of arguments, maintained that a different kind of knowledge was involved in religion. They were not convinced that a man could trust his cognitive powers; they were inclined to believe that he could not confidently assert that he knew Divine nature. In their estimation man's knowledge was merely probability and analogical in kind.

Hume saw the common assumption in the arguments of the Deists and their opponents--that religion is primarily a matter of knowledge and of reasoning. If religion is a purely rational matter, then miracles, Hume argued, must either be rationally justified and understood and hence cease to be miracles or else they must be rejected as mere superstitions. Scepticism is the means of showing the inability of reason to establish religion by rational arguments.

> While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or

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[1]See the discussion on the Deistic writers in John Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1932), pp. 119f.

> fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from and to eternity?[1]

Scepticism also brings freedom from superstition and points towards the right kind of knowledge--the science of human nature. Hume attempted to lift religion out of the sphere of reason; religion must find its basis in human nature.

Hume took scepticism seriously and applied it with destructive effect against the opinions of the Deistic theologians and the Rationalist philosophers who worked with them. In the concluding paragraph of the Enquiry the phrase "of divinity or school metaphysics" indicates the antagonists Hume had in mind.

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles [which Hume had previously laid down], what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames; for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[2]

Observed objects cannot, of themselves, reveal the quality which leads us to suppose one a cause, another an effect. It is the observer who projects the quality from his own mind. This strange process of projection works only for experience and no further. It does not enable us to draw conclusions about things themselves supposed to exist beyond the range of experience. Consequently, natural theology is futile except in so far as it concerns itself with what we can and do observe in the creation. But just as futile is the scientist's

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[1]E, 162. [2]E, 165.

pretension that fictitious entities--aether, electrons, quanta and so forth--are more real and powerful in themselves than the things that we observe in common life.

In a very real sense Hume challenged scientific as well as theological dogmas. From his point of view, the man of science, who builds a rational system on the uniformity of nature, and the theologian, who appeals to the immutable attributes of God, are alike constructing dogmatic theories. The militant rationalist assails religion in the name of science; but in reality a science based on reason goes outside the limits of a philosophy of pure experience in much the same way as dogmatic theology. Both go beyond the limits of fact when they argue for real connection when all that can be demonstrated is mere conjunction. In the Treatise and here again in the Enquiry Hume attempted to demolish the foundation of a rational science of nature. "Our most holy religion" is founded on a faith which has no foundation in reason; but the same faith is also the foundation of science. Just as the Christian believer stakes his hope on a mere promise of something to be fulfilled in the future so the convinced believer in science stakes everything on a promise of the same kind which the course of events may destroy at any moment. There is a close analogy between the faith required for religious and for scientific purposes. Save for what we may derive from figures or numbers, our knowledge of the facts of science is only a form of faith that things having followed the "laws of nature" in a certain order must, of necessity, continue to do so. It appears that Hume recognized

the subject of miracles as being a crucial point in the scientific-theological dispute and took this opportunity to strike another blow at the rationalistic interpretation of the universe.[1]

The Essay "Of Miracles" fits clearly into the rest of the Enquiry[2] and raises the important problem of human belief and its foundation. Hume's argument is based on the doctrine of belief modelled on analogies drawn from Newtonian physics. His general point of view is that the uniformity of nature is established by experience. He believes this even though he has proved that we lack grounds in reason for believing in it. There can be no event "contrary to uniform experience of the course of nature in cases where all the circumstances are the same."[3] This argument may be correlated with the rules formulated in the Treatise for the discovery of causal connections.[4] The fact that Hume formed rules for the discovery of causal sequence shows that he did not regard these sequences as something to be accepted on the basis of uncritical observations. The breaking of sequences, established by critical tests, would undermine human knowledge and introduce uncertainty into human life. This being the case, Hume tries to demonstrate that miracles, properly so called, can never be justified by the faculty of reason. Rational inquiry shows that miracles never

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[1] See E, 103-105.

[2] Mary Shaw Kuypers contends that the sections on theology "certainly furnish a nice example of the application of the empirical principle of causation to a specific problem." [Kuypers, op, cit., p. 74.]

[3] E, 114n.

[4] See T, 173-174.

have occurred, nor is it possible that they ever can occur. No alleged miracle in sacred or profane history has enough evidence for us to give it credit.

The predominately critical character of the essay on miracles is in line with the rest of the book. Hume's attitude is uncompromising. He argues that the evidence for a miracle "carried falsehood upon the very face of it, and that a miracle, supported by any human testimony, was more properly a subject of derision than of argument."[1] His reasoning deals principally with the credibility of testimony. Human testimony being what it is, Hume declares that it is more probable that the witnesses to miracles are lying or themselves deceived than that the so-called miracles are true. He rejects both Christian and ecclesiastical miracles on the general ground of the insufficiency and unreliableness of human testimony. Hume reasons that the reports of the occurrence of miracles furnished by witnesses must always appear unlikely to any one who candidly examines them, since experience finds the uniformity of nature much more dependable than the accuracy of human testimony. He states: ". . . no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any . . . system of religion."[2]

This interpretation, it must be admitted, does not show the inconceivability of miracles. The additional factor of a divine volition might lead someone to suggest that we should recognize a new cause--the supernatural. Hume states the reason why he regards as insoluable the problem of

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[1] E, 124.

[2] E, 127.

determining if a result is to be assigned to a divine volition. Those interferences with natural order, on which theologians rested the chief evidence of God's action, seemed to Hume to detract from that action. If the exceptions to the laws of nature are most conspicuously divine, then the laws themselves are less divine. If Providence is removed from the series of events before and after the miracles, then it appears that God is not infinite. To believe in miracles means that one would be forced to regard ordinary events as less divine than other phenomena or else the Divine Being, present in all, operates less intensely, or to less purpose, through certain events than through others. A miracle, according to Hume, so far from being consistent with and following from theism is really opposed to it. A belief in miracles is really atheistic.

Furthermore, Hume appears to be suggesting that if theism is to make use of the teleological argument (the only argument to which he gives any recognition), then the uniformity of nature must first be established. If that becomes shaken, then we must give up every hope of reaching God as First Cause by a posteriori reasoning. Those individuals who profess belief in miracles are in effect substituting chance for regularity. Thus, the very possibility for a posteriori arguments is destroyed. Norman Kemp Smith suggests that

> Hume's treatment of miracles has a premiss to which he has not in this section referred--namely, that we have, and can have, no grounds either in reason or in experience for postulating the kind of God to whom alone the Scriptural or other miracles can fittingly be ascribed. This, and not the sheerly logical considerations bearing on belief, testimony, and evidence generally, is the context within which the issues regarding miracles properly arise. To supply

> this context would, however, have left his argument very much in the air. Hume's problem, therefore, in the Enquiry, was to introduce it without yet saying too much.[1]

Kemp Smith contends that Hume supplied the context for miracles in Section XI of the Enquiry--"Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State." This essay, written in the form of a dialogue, in many ways anticipates the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. The subject discussed in both is similar. The essay in the Enquiry gives Hume's first treatment of the argument from design and shows his line of approach to the problems of the Dialogues. "What Hume seeks to show," asserts Kemp Smith, "is that this argument, even if its own explicit assumptions be not questioned, fails to establish the kind of Deity that belief in a particular providence (or in miracles) must require us to suppose."[2] Hume invents a friend "who loves sceptical paradoxes,"[3] and puts into his mouth doubts regarding the teleological proof. The reasoning proceeds as follows:

> If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities, beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect: Nor can we, by any rules of just reasoning, return back from the cause, and infer other effects from it, beyond those by which alone it is known to us.[4]

Hume argues that it is contrary to the rules of analogy to reason from human design to the procedure of the Infinite.[5] The subjects are infinitely different. In the one case, we infer an extension of finite design from our partial experiences.

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[1]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 50.

[2]Ibid., p. 51. [3]E, 132. [4]E, 136. [5]E, 137.

In the other, our inference is from the finite to the Infinite. We know human contrivance by experience and can easily pass from the effect to the cause. But it is totally different with every inference drawn by us as to the Deity. The universe, which is supposed to yield us the inference, is a "singular effect," with no parallel. The inference from a unique effect (the world) to a unique cause (God) is branded as unphilosophical.

> All the philosophy, therefore, in the world, and all the religion, which is nothing but a species of philosophy, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and behaviour different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life. No new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis; no event foreseen or foretold; no reward or punishment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice and observation.[1]

> If experience and observation and analogy be, indeed, the only guides which we can reasonably follow in inferences of this nature; both the effect and cause must bear a similarity and resemblance to other effects and causes, which we know, and which we have found, in many instances, to be conjoined with each other. I leave it to your own reflection to pursue the consequences of this principle.[2]

The fundamental issue raised by Hume in the essay involves a challenge to the argument from design in any and every form. The question arises "whether the argument from design, as an argument from analogy, can allow of being formulated in a tenable manner."[3] This, as we shall see later, is the primary problem of the Dialogues. The argument from design is the fundamental proof in the theistic position and yet it appears to be indefensible. Hume believes that he has arrived at the

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[1] E, 146. [2] E, 148.

[3] Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 56.

crux of the theological situation. "[He] is conscious," writes Kemp Smith, "that he is attacking the very citadel of religion, and not merely certain of its outworks."[1]

The result of the essay is more or less indefinite, but it confirms the suggestion that Hume realized the difficulties of any attempt to base religion upon reason. From the very nature of the case, immortality and theistic belief cannot be demonstrated as a mathematical proposition can be. The immortality of the soul and the existence of God are not evidenced as facts of sensible experience and so cannot be empirically verified. Hume recognized the problems inherent in the argument from design and intimated that the acceptance of theism is not a matter merely of reason but rests in a more fundamental way upon the emotional nature of man. Religion is a matter of faith or belief.

Disappointments and Further Literary Endeavors

The next fifteen years of David Hume's life are characterized by success and failure, side-by-side. Literary success came to him, but with it came hostility from certain sections of society. An undercurrent of bitter disappointment and frustration accompanied the achievement of his ambition in letters. He was not immediately encouraged by the sale of the Enquiry and a new edition of the Essays, Moral and Political. But in the year 1749 his publisher, Andrew Millar, informed him that his "former Publications (all but the unfortunate

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[1] Ibid., p. 50.

Treatise) were beginning to be the Subject of Conversation, that the Sale of them was gradually encreasing, and that new Editions were demanded. Answers, by Reverends and Right Reverends, came out two or three in a Year: And I found by Dr Warburtons Railing that the Books were beginning to be esteemed in good Company."[1] Although Hume exaggerated the number of answers that appeared, there was evidence of interest in the theological and metaphysical questions raised by his reasoning. Mossner found that "answers to the two Enquiries (including "Of Miracles") alone totalled two in 1751; four in 1752; five in 1753; three in 1754; and two in 1755."[2] Christian apologists and theologians, alarmed by Hume's attack upon the traditional foundations of religion, began to print refutations of his views.

William Warburton did not himself publish any answer to Hume's arguments about God and miracles although his ideas were especially offensive to the theologian. In a letter of September 28, 1749, to his friend Richard Hurd, Warburton declared:

> I am strongly tempted too to have a stroke at Hume in parting. He is the author of a little book called "Philosophical Essays," in one part of which he argues about the being of a God, and in another (very needlessly you will say) against the possibility of miracles. He has crowned the liberty of the press. And yet he has a considerable post under the Government. I have a great mind to do justice on his arguments against miracles, which I think might be done in a few words. But does he deserve notice? Is he known amongst you? Pray answer me these questions. For if his own weight keeps him down, I should be sorry

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[1] Letters, I, 3.

[2] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 286.

to contribute to his advancement to any place but the pillory.[1]

On June 15th of the following year Warburton wrote to Philip Doddridge: "Some persons of consideration would persuade me to take to task at the end of the second volume of Julian a chapter of one Hume on Miracles in a rank atheistical Book called Philosophical Essays: and as the subject of the second part may be a little ticklish, perhaps it may be prudent to conciliate warm tempers by such a conclusion."[2] For some reason Warburton held back and never published any attack on "Of Miracles." He contemplated a criticism, and some remarks on the question are to be found among his papers. But evidently he decided that Hume was not sufficiently known or deserving of an answer at this time.

During the period from 1749 to 1751 Hume lived with his brother in the country and there composed the Political Discourses and the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, which was a refashioning of Book III of the Treatise. Moving to Edinburgh, Hume published the Discourses late in 1751 and the Enquiry early in 1752. The Political Discourses were, in his own words, "successful on the first Publication"[3] and

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[1] William Warburton, Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of His Friends (2nd ed., London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), p. 14.

[2] Quoted in John Nichols, Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprising Biographical Memoirs of William Bowyer, etc. (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1812-1815), V, 601. [See Letters to and From Philip Doddridge, ed. T. Stedman (Shrewsbury, 1790), p. 207.]

[3] Letters, I, 4.

profoundly influenced his contemporaries, especially those on the continent. The second Enquiry, which in Hume's estimation, "is of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best," did not sell and "came unnoticed and onobserved into the world."[1] Also in 1751 the second edition of the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding appeared.

Hume wrote a few squibs and pamphlets at this time, but most of them have subsequently been lost.[2] One pamphlet entitled the Petition of the Grave and Venerable Bellmen, or Sextons, of the Church of Scotland, To the Honourable House of Commons has been preserved and is valuable in the consideration of Hume's basic position on religion and the church. A letter to John Clephane discloses the first reference to the Petition. Hume writes:

> . . . since I am in the humour of displaying my wit, I must tell you that lately, at an idle hour, I wrote a sheet called the Bellman's Petition: wherein (if I be not partial, which I certainly am) there was some good pleasantry and satire. The printers in Edinburgh refused to print it, (a good sign, you'll say, of my prudence and discretion).[3]

The Petition is mentioned again in a letter written to Gilbert

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[1]Letters, I, 4. There appeared in 1753, however, a criticism of the Enquiry entitled A Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality, with Reflections upon Mr. Hume's Book, etc. Published anonymously, the book had been written by James Balfour, who occupied the Chair in Edinburgh University for which Hume had been a candidate. Hume was pleased with the treatment given his moral theory and left with the publisher a note to the author. In this letter Hume states that philosophical topics should furnish "agreeable matter to discourse and conversation" and adds, "I have surely endeavoured to refute the Sceptic with all the force of which I am master; and my refutation must be allowed sincere, because drawn from the capital principles of my system." [Letters, I, 173.]

[2]Note Appendix A in Letters, II, 340.

[3]Letters, I, 149.

Elliot when Hume states:

> I send you enclos'd a little Endeavour at Drollery, against some People who care not much to be jok'd upon. I have frequently had it in my Intention to write a Supplement to Gulliver, containing the Ridicule of Priests. Twas certainly a Pity that Swift was a Parson. Had he been a Lawyer or Physician, we had nevertheless been entertain'd at the Expense of these Professions. But Priests are so jealous, that they cannot bear to be touch'd on that Head; and for a plain Reason: Because they are conscious they are really ridiculous. That Parts of the Doctor's Subject is so fertile, that a much inferior Genius, I am confident, might succeed in it.[1]

Hume's satire, which illustrates his antipathy to ministers at this time, is a part of a controversy of 1748-1751 on a clerical issue occasioned by the decision of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to seek redress from parliament for the clergy's small stipends. The attempt was abandoned when the gentlemen heritors of the Church objected to granting the increase which would have come out of their own pockets.[2] Hume had some years earlier declared that "the Church is my Aversion"[3] and his attitude towards clergymen was made evident in a note appended to the essay "Of National Characters" in 1748. He now mocks the ministers in a parody on their representation. Hume claims to show that bell-ringers have the same, or even greater claims on the liberality of the public. The petition of the bellmen is supported by the following reasons:

> That it can be proved demonstrably from Scripture and reason, that the cause of religion is as intimately and inseparably connected with the temporal interests and

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[1] Letters, I, 153.

[2] See Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, pp. 148-152.

[3] New Letters, p. 26.

world grandeur of your Petitioners as with any of these ecclesiastics whatsoever.

That your Petitioners serve in the quality of grave-diggers, the great use and necessity of their order, in every well regulated commonwealth, has never been called in question by any just reasoner; an advantage they possess above their brethren, the Reverend Clergy.

That their usefulness is as extensive as it is great; for even those who neglect religion, or despise learning, must yet, sometime or other, stand in need of the good offices of this grave and venerable order. . . .

That as your Petitioners are but half ecclesiastics, it may be expected they will not be altogether unreasonable or exorbitant in their demands.

That the present poverty of your Petitioners in this kingdom is a scandal to all religion, it being easy to prove, that a modern Bellman is not more richly endowed than a primitive apostle, and consequently possesseth not the twentieth part of the revenues belonging to a Presbyterian Clergyman.

That whatever freedom the profane scoffers and free-thinkers of the age may use with our Reverend Brethren the Clergy, the boldest of them trembles when he thinks of us; and that a simple reflection on us has reformed more lives than all the sermons in the world. . . .

That your Petitioners trust the Honourable House will not despise them on account of the present meanness of their condition; for having heard a learned man say, that the Cardinals who are now Princes, were once nothing but parish curates of Rome, your Petitioners observing the same laudable measures to be now prosecuted, despair not of being one day on a level with the nobility and gentry of these realms.[1]

No doubt productions such as the above confirmed the belief in the minds of Hume's contemporaries that he was the chief destroyer of morality and religion. His analysis of man's nature was not understood and his persistent enquiry concerning the meaning of such terms as "causality", "personal identity" and "external existence" aroused widespread prejudice. Yet, it was not so much what he had said about religion but what he had been reticent to say that brought so much opposition.

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[1] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 236 and in Burton, op. cit., I, 317-319.

On the whole he had been silent with regard to his personal attitude towards divine reality. There are several intimations in his works that he had been thinking about these things and his letters confirm this. Nevertheless, he stated nothing definite because he felt it necessary to think through these deep problems more thoroughly. It appears that near the age of forty Hume decided to make an effort to eliminate the suspicions surrounding him--suspicions that he was an atheist, a deist, or an infidel; a person who had discarded religion in all forms as a harmful system of superstitions and excesses. It was at this time that he began to write his thoughts on religion.[1] He had certain convictions; but he also had doubts, and his expression of these in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion took the form of a conversation.[2] The Dialogues were given to Hume's intimate friends for criticism. They admired the literary excellence of the work but strongly advised against publication. The relentless questions of a sceptical attitude of mind were so easily misunderstood, and Hume's friends feared that the zealots' hatred for him would be increased and his prospects as an author permanently injured. The manuscripts were not destroyed, however, and Hume continued to study the problems involved, adding to and revising what he first wrote.

Opposition to David Hume, mainly for religious reasons,

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[1]See letter of March 10, 1751 to Gilbert Elliot, Letters, I, 153-157.

[2]For an intensive study of the thesis that the Dialogues are an actual dramatization of Hume's mental conflict over religious problems, see C. W. Hendel, Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume.

again frustrated his attempt to enter academic life. In 1752 he applied for the Chair of Logic at the University of Glasgow. The clergy of the city followed the example set by their Edinburgh brethren seven years earlier and very strongly advised the college not to choose Hume. William Cullen, Professor of Medicine, pressed Hume's claims with great vigor.[1] Adam Smith, who as yet hardly knew Hume, had some doubts and wrote thus to Cullen: "I should prefer David Hume to any man for a colleague; but I am afraid the public would not be of my opinion; and the interest of the society will oblige us to have some regard to the opinion of the public."[2] Concerning the tumult raised by the suggestion of his name, Hume reports to John Clephane: "You have probably heard that my friends in Glasgow, contrary to my opinion and advice, undertook to get me elected into that college; and they had succeeded, in spite of the violent and solemn remonstrances of the clergy, if the Duke of Argyle had had courage to get me the least countenance."[3] A Mr. Clow was chosen for the chair, and thus ended Hume's final endeavor to secure an academic post.

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[1]Hume wrote Cullen: "The part which you have acted in the late project for my election into your College, gave me so much pleasure, that I should do myself the greatest violence did I not take every opportunity of expressing my most lively sense of it. . . . Whatever the reverend gentlemen may say of my religion, I hope I have as much morality as to retain a grateful sentiment of your favours, and as much sense as to know whose friendship will give greatest honour and advantage to me." [Letters, I, 163.]

[2]John Thomson, Life, Lectures and Writings of William Cullen (Edinburgh, 1832), I, 606.

[3]Letters, I, 164.

Success in Society and Friendship with the Moderates

All was not disappointment and frustration in Hume's public experience, for he was elected librarian of the Faculty of Advocates even in the face of considerable opposition from religious zealots.[1] Hume writes humorously to his friends concerning some of the episodes surrounding the incident. He expresses much satisfaction at the outcome and says,

> I have been ready to burst with vanity and self-conceit this past week; and being obliged from decorum to keep a strict watch over myself, and check all eruptions of that kind, I really begin to find my health impaired by it. . . . 'Tis not on my account alone you are to take part in this great event; philosophy, letters, science, virtue, triumph along with me, and have now in this one singular instance, brought over even the people from the side of bigotry and superstition.[2]

Stating that his friends had submitted his name to fill the vacancy of the library-keeper, Hume continues:

> The President, and the Dean of Faculty his son, who used to rule absolutely in this body of advocates, formed an aversion to the project, because it had not come from them; and they secretly engaged the whole party called Squadrone against me. The bigots joined them, and both together set up a gentleman of character, and an advocate, and who had great favour on both these accounts. The violent cry of Deism, atheism, and scepticism, was raised against me; and 'twas represented that my election would be giving the sanction of the greatest and most learned body of men in this country to my profane and irreligious principles. But what was more dangerous, my opponents entered into a regular concert and cabal against me; while my friends were contented to speak well of their project in general, without having once formed a regular list of the electors, or considered of the proper methods of engaging them. Things went on in this negligent manner till within six days of the election, when they met together and found themselves in some danger of being outnumbered; immediately

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[1] "The proposal to give Hume even this paltry place caused a great outcry, on the old score of infidelity." [Huxley, op. cit., p. 32.]

[2] Letters, I, 164.

> upon which they raised the cry of indignation against the opposite party; and the public joined them so heartily, that our antagonists durst show their heads in no companies nor assemblies: expresses were despatched to the country, assistance flocked to us from all quarters, and I carried the election by a considerable majority, to the great joy of all bystanders.[1]
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> 'Twas vulgarly given out, that the contest was betwixt Deists and Christians; and when the news of my success came to the play-house, the whisper ran that the Christians were defeated. Are you not surprised that we could keep our popularity, notwithstanding this imputation, which my friends could not deny to be well founded?
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> . . . next morning I had the drums and town music at my door, to express their joy, as they said, of my being made a great man. They could not imagine, that so great a fray could be raised about so mere a trifle.[2]

About the same time that Hume became "a great man" in his own city, he entered into friendship with the Moderate group of Presbyterian clergymen. He came to live in the strictest intimacy and the most cordial relationships with a number of these ministers.[3] The younger moderates seemed little offended by the freedom of Hume's writing on theological and religious matters. Although they often disagreed with his philosophical and religious opinions, they always respected his genius as an author and gave him due regard as a man of letters.[4]

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[1] Letters, I, 165. [2] Letters, I, 166-167.

[3] Mossner states: "There can be little doubt that, had [Hume] been intimately associated with this group earlier, his famous note on the character of the clergy [see infra, p. 258.] would not have appeared in the form that it did." [Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 274.]

[4] Alexander Carlyle describes the friendship of Hume with liberal-minded clergy as follows: "He took much to the company of the younger clergy, not from a wish to bring them over to his own opinions, for he never attempted to overturn any man's

Hume's acquaintance with Reverend Robert Wallace (1697-1771) is an excellent illustration of how well Hume got on with the Moderates. Wallace was a man of influence, prestige and liberal principles. Ramsay of Ochtertyre spoke of him as "one of the first of our philosophical clergy."[1] Thomas Somerville called Wallace "the Philosopher" and claimed that "his prayers breathed a seraphic spirit and his sermons were remarkable not only for originality and vigour, but for a glow of sentiment."[2] He was a great admirer of Shaftesbury's philanthropic views and style and did not always confine himself in the pulpit to "Gospel topics."[3] Wallace distinguished himself as combining an interest in mathematical and theological subjects. Assistant to James Gregory (the Edinburgh Professor of Mathematics in 1720) and member of the Rankenian Club, he was later on preacher in Moffat (1723), minister of New Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh (1733) and New North Church, Edinburgh (1739). In 1743 he was Moderator of the General Assembly and in the following year was given charge of church patronage in Scotland. He was also appointed one of the royal chaplains for Scotland and dean of the Chapel Royal.

The first mention we have of Robert Wallace in connection

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principles, but they best understood his notions, and could furnish him with literary conversation. . . . This intimacy of the young clergy with David Hume enraged the zealots on the opposite side, who little knew how impossible it was for him, had he been willing, to shake their principles." [Carlyle, op. cit., pp. 288-289.]

[1]Ramsay of Ochtertyre, op. cit., I, 246.

[2]Thomas Somerville, op. cit., p. 59.

[3]Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, p. 192.

with David Hume goes back to the candidacy for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. Hume was not entirely undefended by the ministers. This is evident from a letter written to Henry Home in which Hume says, "I think Mr Wallace's conduct has been very noble & generous; & I am much oblig'd to him."[1] Mossner has discovered confirmatory evidence of Wallace's defense of Hume in an unsigned letter to the printer of the London Chronicle, 5-7 November 1776. The account gives the following information.

> . . . it is true that most of the clergy objected to the electing of honest David, grounding their objection on "A Treatise on Human Nature," published in 1739, which had been ascribed to him. All the body, however, did not concur in the measure. The late celebrated Dr. Wallace, faithful to those generous sentiments which he had early imbibed and uniformly professed, with an impartiallity as well as dignity becoming them, declared to the counsellors in strong terms, that he did not think himself entitled to give his opinion, on pretext too of a juvenile as well as anonymous performance, which had been little read, and which was less understood, against chusing that ingenious gentleman, more than any of the other candidates. The Doctor's liberal mind was elevated far above, and his philosophic indignation was greatly raised at the inquisitorial zeal discovered on this occasion.[2]

Wallace's connections with Hume continued for many years on a friendly basis.[3] In an unpublished paper[4] Wallace

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[1] New Letters, p. 15.

[2] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 159.

[3] For a full account of the relations between Hume and Wallace see E. C. Mossner, The Forgotten Hume (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), pp. 105-131 and Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 260-268; 348-352; 262-263. [Cf. F. H. Heinemann, David Hume; The Man and His Science of Man, Containing Some Unpublished Letters of Hume (Paris: Hermann & Co., 1940), pp. 7-22.]

[4] "A Letter from a Moderate Freethinker to David Hume Esquire concerning the Profession of the Clergy. In Which It

attempts to refute Hume's attack against the clergy in the essay "Of National Characters" which appeared in the 1748 edition of the Essays Moral and Political.[1] The outcome of the controversy has been summarized as follows:

> Hume had attacked the clerical character by confining himself to the fanatic. Wallace defended the clerical character by confining himself to the Moderates. How right both were, each in his way, will be observable in the later attempts of the fanatics to excommunicate Hume and in Wallace's reactions to those attempts. Yet, on the basis of their own opinions, there was no reason why Hume and Wallace should not be friends. And, indeed, they took an immediate fancy to one another. Doubtless it was this affinity that induced Wallace not to publish the "Letter from a Moderate Freethinker," which had apparently been completed shortly before he met Hume in the summer of 1751.[2]

Wallace and Hume entered into correspondence and often exchanged papers for comments before printing. "Both were supremely conscious that in treating one another with toleration and courtesy they were achieving the highest standards set by the Age of Enlightenment."[3] One exchange of letters

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Is shewed that their Vices What ever they Are Are Owing to their Disposition and Not to the Bad Influence of Their Profession." This unpublished tract is in the Edinburgh University Library in the Historical Manuscripts Commission Report on the Laing Manuscripts preserved in the University of Edinburgh, II,96.

[1] In a long digressive footnote on the character of clergymen, Hume reinforces his attack by purporting to show that their peculiar vices are caused by the very nature of their profession. He accuses the clergy of feigning more devotion than they felt at certain times. He claims they promote the spirit of superstition by continued "grimaces," over-zealousness and hypocrisy. Ministers are characterized by Hume as possessing a proclivity towards an overwhelming conceit of themselves, an exaggerated ambition, theological hatred, and a spirit of revenge. [G. G., III, 245-247n.]

[2] Mossner, The Forgotten Hume, p. 111.

[3] Ibid., p. 112.

reveals their attitude. Writing on September 22, 1751, Hume tells Wallace:

> I hope it will give Offence to no Body, that you & I have a correspondence together on literary subjects.
> There has been printed at London, but not yet publish'd an Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals of which I have order'd a Copy to be sent you; I hope you will not find my Ethics liable to much Exception, on the Side of Orthodoxy, whatever they may be on the Side of Argument & Philosophy.[1]

Wallace responded with courtesy and respect:

> I thank you for the present you have ordered me of a Copy of your "Inquiry concerning the Principles of Moralls." Whether Orthodox or Heterodox I cannot answer but I dare say it will be curious and give me a usefull instruction: and I can be finely entertained with an ingenious vain of thinking tho very different from my own & much out of the common road (the more uncommon perhaps the greater entertainment, if one is not a bigott & can make proper allowances to a philosophical genius) . . . .[2]

The letter concludes:

> I will only add that I am not afraid our Correspondence will give any offence, nor do I believe that any with whom I have any great connexion have such narrow souls. But if they have it would be too great a sacrifice to refuse what is so agreeable, the compliment of such an ingenious & learned Gentlemen as Mr Hume & I hope I shall allways have the boldness to do justice to Gentlemen of your Character. . . .[3]

Hume answered this "very obliging Letter" and queried, "Why cannot all the World entertain different Opinions about any Subject, as amicably as we do?"[4] Other letters to Wallace indicate that Hume was still interested in the problem of miracles and exchanged several pamphlets on the subject.[5]

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[1] New Letters, p. 29. This letter is important in showing that Hume had not abandoned hope that his ethics would be acceptable to Orthodoxy.

[2] Quoted by Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 265.

[3] Ibid.

[4] New Letters, p. 30.

[5] See New Letters, pp. 33-34.

In so far as Hume identified himself with church politics, he adopted the views of Wallace and the Moderate party. He agreed with the Moderates' concept that by maintaining a high intellectual and social standard in the established clergy, the Church could be purged of bigotry, fanaticism and extreme zeal. The Moderates stood solidly behind the doctrine of patronage. Hume hoped that by means of patronage the worst evils of the twin forms of false religion--superstition and enthusiasm--might be mitigated. It was in support of such a view that he had written the Bellmen's Petition. Doubtlessly, Hume felt that men like Robert Wallace, William Robertson, John Jardine, Alexander Carlyle, John Home, and Hugh Blair were better judges of the type of minister to be ordained than a congregation of superstitious, enthusiastic, and illiterate zealots. But in emphasizing the promotion of sound morals and decorum in the church, Hume and the Moderates failed to make allowance for the devotional elements in religion. This, as we saw in Chapter II, was one of the main reasons for the decay of Moderatism, and this is also one of the major defects in the religious thought of David Hume.

Hume's prejudice against churches and clergy must frequently have been the cause of debate with his Moderate friends. They presumably preached at him and argued about the necessity of revealed religion but without enmity.[1] On one occasion Hume gave Hugh Blair the following remonstrance:

> . . . permit me . . . the freedom of saying a word to yourself. Whenever I have had the pleasure to be in your

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[1]Carlyle, op. cit., p. 285.

> company, if the discourse turned upon any common subject of literature or reasoning, I always parted from you both entertained and instructed. But when the conversation was diverted by you from this channel towards the subject of your profession; tho I doubt not but your intentions were very friendly towards me, I own I never received the same satisfaction: I was apt to be tired, and you to be angry. I would therefore wish for the future, wherever my good fortune throws me in your way, that these topics should be forborne between us. I have, long since, done with all inquiries on such subjects, and am become incapable of instruction; tho I own no one is more capable of conveying it than yourself.[1]

An interesting incident is recorded concerning a visit of Hume with John Jardine, one of his most attached friends. Declining to be lighted down the stairs, Hume lost his way in the darkness and was found by Jardine who remarked, "Davie, I have often tellt ye that 'natural licht' is no sufficient."[2] According to one of Carlyle's anecdotes, Hume's good-natured pleasantry sometimes touched upon religion:

> Being at Gilmerton, where David Hume was on a visit, Sir David Kinloch made him go to Athlestaneford Church, where I preached for John Home. When we met before Dinner, "What did you mean," says he to me, "by treating John's congregation today with one of Cicero's academics? I did not think that such heathen morality would have passed in East Lothian." On Monday, when we were assembling to breakfast, David retired to the end of the dining room, when Sir David entered: . . ."Take away the enemy first," says David. The baronet, thinking it was the warm fire that kept David in the lower end of the room, rung the bell for a servant to carry some of it off. It was not the fire that scared David, but a large Bible that was left on a stand at the upper end of the room. . . .[3]

The correspondence of David Hume with the Edinburgh ministers occasionally turned to religious topics, and he expressed his feelings about spiritual matters. During his residence in Paris, he kept in touch with "my Protestant Pastors"

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[1] Letters, I, 351. [2] Carlyle, op. cit., p. 285.

[3] Ibid., pp. 290-291.

at Edinburgh and in a letter addressed to Hugh Blair he declares:

> I am in debt to all my Friends in Letters, and shall ever be so; but what strikes me chiefly with Remorse are my great & enormous Debts to the Clergy. By this Neglect of my Protestant Pastors, you will begin to suspect that I am turning Papist. But to acquit myself at once, allow me to write you a common Letter, and to address a few Words to every one of you.[1]

To Dr. Jardine, Hume relates the following incident:

> In order to refute all Calumnies, hear a short Story. Not long ago, as I came into a Company, I heard D'Alembert exclaim, Et verbum caro factum est. And the Word was made Flesh. This was thought a very good Jest on my past & present Life; and was much repeated. A Lady in telling the Story, said Et verbum carum factum est. When told of her Mistake, she wou'd not allow it to be one.[2]

Informing Blair of the differences between England and France, Hume states that France is characterized by "the general Re-gard pay'd to Genius and Learning; the universal and professed, tho' decent, Gallantry of the Fair Sex; . . . the almost universal Contempt of all Religion, among both Sexes, and among all Ranks of Men. . . ." Hume regards England as a nation "relapsing fast into the deepest Stupidity, Christianity & Ignorance."[3] A few months later he writes Blair: "Mr Hume recommends himself to Ferguson and Jardine and John Adams and Mrs Adams, and to all the Poker, and desires the Prayers of the Faithful for him on this Occasion."[4] In another letter Hume informs the minister:

> I am told, that Lord Hertford's Intentions in my Favour made a great Fray in London. The Princess Amelia said,

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[1] Letters, I, 495. [2] Letters, I, 496.

[3] Letters, I, 497-498. [4] Letters, I, 514.

> that she thought the Matter might be easily accomodated. Why cannot Lord Hertford says she make him a Bishop. The Lord Lieutenant has many good Bishoprics to dispose of.[1]

Near the close of his life Hume jokingly wrote: "Two Ladies of my Acquaintance have laid a Scheme of bringing Lady Huntingdon and me together for her or my Conversion. I wish I may have Spirits to humour this Folly."[2] Blair took this incident seriously for he replied:

> I would not wish you to have any thing to do with that tribe [the Methodists] either in joke or in earnest. You can have no sort of intercourse with them that will not be misrepresented. You are too conspicuous a figure to be let pass without their fathering some foolish story on you.[3]

In addition to revealing the close relationship of Hume with the Edinburgh clergy, these letters indicate his interest in the welfare of the Moderate Party. He conveys his sympathy at the death of Jardine:

> I cannot begin my Letter without lamenting most sincerely the Death of our Friend, Dr Jardine: . . . surely we shall ever regret the Loss of a very pleasant Companion and of a very friendly honest man. It makes a blank which you must all feel, and which I in particular will sensibly feel, when I come amongst you. I need not ask you, whether the Miscreants of the opposite Party did not rejoice. For I take it for granted.[4]

When Hume occupied a place of authority in the government, he endeavoured to aid his Edinburgh friends. He informed Blair on one occasion that he "shou'd willingly have seconded Dr Wallace's Application for the Thistle. . . ."[5] Hume's interest in the affairs of the Church is indicated by such

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[1] Letters, I, 518. [2] Letters, II, 321.

[3] Quoted by Greig in Letters, II, 321.

[4] Letters, II, 50. [5] Letters, II, 57.

statements as these in his letters:

> Tell Robertson, that the Compliment at the End of General Conway's Letter to him was of my composing, without any Orders from him. He smild when he read it; but said it was very proper, and signed it. These are not bad puffs from Ministers of State, as the silly World goes.[1]

> . . . I learn that Willie Robertson is Candidate for the Office of Procurator to the Kirk. How I lament my Absence at so critical a time! Yet I allow you to employ my Name and Interest, in all Sollicitations with the Members of the Assembly, which will, I hope, have the same effect as my personal Applications.[2]

Hume's dealings with the Moderates were always cordial, and the inner circle of liberal divines remained his good friends from the early 1750's throughout his life. Mossner characterizes the relationship thus:

> [The Moderates] helped to fight Hume's battles when he was attacked by the bigots; and he, when in government office, gave them his official patronage and, always, the weight of his prestige and influence. It was, to a considerable extent, their comaraderie that rendered Edinburgh agreeable to Hume during the latter part of his life, when alien forces were seeking to render it uncomfortable for him or even to drive him out.[3]

Hume as an Historian

While Hume was living in Edinburgh and held the position of Librarian to the Faculty of Advocates, he began to compose his History of Great Britain. The first volume, which dealt with the Stuarts, raised a storm of disapproval. Hume could not help feeling discouraged. It seemed to him that his works had utterly failed to advance the cause of truth; everything he attempted (except the Essays) met with the attacks of

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[1] Letters, II, 141.

[2] Letters, II, 321.

[3] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 278.

blind prejudice. Writing in his autobiography concerning the initial failure of the History, Hume admits:

> I was, I own, sanguine in my Expectations of the Success of this work. I thought, that, I was the only Historian, that had at once neglected present Power, Interest, and Authority, and the Cry of popular Prejudices; and as the Subject was suited to every Capacity, I expected proportional Applause: But miserable was my Disappointment: I was assailed by one Cry of Reproach, Disapprobation, and even Detestation: English, Scotch, and Irish; Whig and Tory; Churchman and Sectary, Free-thinker and Religionist; Patriot and Courtier united in their Rage against the Man, who had presumed to shed a generous Tear for the Fate of Charles I, and the Earl of Strafford: And after the first Ebullitions of this Fury were over, what was still more mortifying, the Book seemed to sink into Oblivion. Mr Millar told me, that in a twelvemonth he sold only forty five Copies of it. I scarcely indeed heard of one man in three Kingdoms, considerable for Rank or Letters, that cou'd endure the Book. I must only except the Primate of England, Dr Herring, and the Primate of Ireland, Dr Stone; which seem two odd Exceptions. These dignifyed Prelates separately sent me Messages not to be discouraged.[1]

Although Hume was in deep despair, he kept working upon the History with the result that the second volume met with fair success. But again, this was only momentary good fortune, for the two final volumes were not well received.

Apparently Hume did not at first believe that his criticisms of religion had an appreciable influence in stopping the sale of Volume I. Before publication he claimed to be impartial in his presentation and informed a friend:

> A Few Christians (and but a few) think I speak like a Libertine in religion: be assured I am tolerably reserved on this head. Elliot tells me that you had entertained apprehensions of my discretion: what I had done to forfeit with you the character of prudence, I cannot tell, but you will see little or no occasion for any such imputation in this work. I composed it ad populum as well as ad clerum, and thought, that scepticism was not in its place in an historical production.[2]

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[1] Letters, I, 4.

[2] Letters, I, 189.

When Baillie Hamilton suggested to Hume "that the Stop in the Sale of my History proceeded from some Strokes of Irreligion, which had raisd the Cry of the Clergy against me,"[1] he was taken completely by surprise. Hume argued that the "Baillie's complaint must have proceeded from his own Misconduct, that the Cause he assigned coud never have produced that Effect, that it was rather likely to encrease the Sale, according to all past Experience; that you [Andrew Millar] had offerd (as I heard) a large Sum for Bolingbroke's Works, trusting to this Consequence; and that the Strokes complaind of were so few & of such small Importance, that, if any ill Effects coud have been apprehended from them, they might easily have been retrenchd."[2]

Critics seized upon two short passages in Volume I of the History. The first dealt with the early Protestant Reformation--which Hume characterized as exhibiting enthusiasm and fanaticism--and the second dealt with the Roman Catholic Church--which he called "Romish Superstition." Hume was antagonistic to the Church of Rome because of its fostering of superstition among the people, licentiousness among the priests and intolerance towards all who valued freedom of thought. The excesses of fanaticism, like those of superstition, Hume considered as causing cruel disturbances in the body politic; therefore, he condemned them on grounds of social utility. On the basis of these passages, Hume's entire historical work was stigmatized as irreligious or even atheistical. The tone

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[1] Letters, I, 249. [2] Letters, I, 249-250.

of the History was indeed one of the grounds on which Hume was attacked in the ecclesiastical courts.[1]

Of the refutations of the History appearing during Hume's lifetime[2] one stands out as of particular interest for our study. The Reverend Daniel MacQueen in Letters on Mr Hume's History of Great Britain (1756) agreed more or less with Hume's strictures on the Roman Catholic Church; if anything, he thought them not severe enough. But MacQueen was alarmed by the charges against Presbyterian enthusiasm. He refused to allow that Protestantism and enthusiasm are identical. He proposed "candid and calm debate" and proceeded to set forth his complaint against Hume's "indecent excursions on the subject of religion, the genius of the Protestant faith, and the characters of the first reformers."[3] MacQueen vindicated "the right of private judgment in all matters of religion," with the rejection of "splendour and glittering pomp of worship"

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[1]See Infra, pp. 272ff.

[2]William Rose briefly commented on the two passages in the March 1755 issue of the Monthly Review. When Hume published the second volume, John Brown brought out in 1757 the lamenting and denunciatory tirade which was noted above. [See supra, p. 9.] This fierce attack was virtually ignored by Hume who said, "I doubt not but I coud easily refute Dr Brown; but as I had taken a Resolution never to have the least Altercation with these Fellows, I shall not readily be brought to pay any Attention to him: . . . I fancy Brown will find it difficult Matter to perswade the Public that I do not speak my Sentiments in every Subject I handle, & that I have any View to any Interest whatsoever. I leave that to him and his Gang: for he is a Flatterer, as I am told, of that low Fellow, Warburton. And any thing as low as Warburton, or his Flatterers, I shoud certainly be ashamed to engage with." [Letters, I, 250.]

[3]Daniel MacQueen, Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid & A. Donaldson, 1756), p. 4.

and claimed for the Reformed faith deliverance of men from the "delusion of an over-heated imagination."[1]

This formal criticism of the History received Hume's attention and MacQueen must be given credit for inducing him to modify his references to religion. The more offensive passages concerning the reformers and their beliefs disappeared and the two controversial passages were deleted from the second edition in 1759. Hume agreed that he had been needlessly impolite:

> I am convinced that whatever I have said of religion should have received some more softenings. There is no passage in the History which strikes in the least at revelation. But as I run over all the sects successively, and speak of each of them with some mark of disregard, the reader, putting the whole together, concludes that I am of no sect; which to him will appear the same thing as the being of no religion.[2]

Hume's suspicion of religion as a malignant force in human affairs caused him to get the proportions of his picture wrong. The vices stood out black and prominent and the virtues faded until they could hardly be discerned at all.

In connection with Volume II of the History, Hume drafted a preface in defence of his position. This appeared in a shortened and toned-down version as a footnote in the first editions but was omitted entirely in later ones.[3] The

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[1] Ibid. [2] Letters, I, 237.

[3] Hume's friend, George Dempster, commenting on the note, wrote in 1756 to Adam Ferguson: "Pray do you think this is a sufficient justification for the liberties which Hume takes almost at every turn with the religion of the ages whose history he writes. It seems difficult for me (for me who dotes upon David) to believe that he can have a great regard for even the best mode of religion and the least extravagant, if we consider how destitute he is of that only support of it, Faith." [George Dempster, Letters to Sir Adam Ferguson, 1756-1813, ed.

suppressed preface has value in the understanding of Hume on both history and religion. It has been reproduced as follows by Mossner:

> It ought to be no matter of Offence, that in this Volume, as well as in the foregoing, the Mischiefs which arise from the Abuses of Religion, are so often mentioned while so little in comparison is said of the salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine Piety. The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws & Civil Magistrates. While it pursues these useful Purposes, its Operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret & silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History. That adulterate Species of it alone, which inflames Faction, animates Sedition, & prompts Rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open Theatre of the World. Those therefore who attempt to draw Inferences disadvantageous to Religion from the Abuses of it mentioned by Historians, proceed upon a very gross & a very obvious Fallacy. For besides, that everything is liable to Abuse, & the best things the most so; the beneficent Influence of Religion is not to be sought for in History: That Principle is always the more pure & genuine, the less figure it makes in those Annals of Wars, & Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions, which it is the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity.
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> It ought as little to be matter of Offence, that no religious Sect is mentioned in this Work without being expos'd sometimes to some Note of Blame and Disapprobation.. The frailties of our Nature mingle themselves with everything, in which we are employ'd; and no human Institution will ever reach Perfection. The Idea of an Infinite Mind, the Author of the Universe seems at first sight to require a Worship absolutely pure, simple, unadorned; without Rites, Institutions, Ceremonies; even without Temples, Priests, or verbal Prayer & Supplication; Yet has this Species of Devotion been often found to degenerate into the most dangerous Fanaticism. When we have recourse to the aid of the Senses & Imagination, in

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James Fergusson (London, 1934), p. 22.]

It was suggested that the note was omitted because Hume considered it inconsistent with his real convictions. [See (S. J. Pratt), Supplement to the Life of David Hume, Esq. (London: J. Bew, 1777), p. 20.]

It is much more likely that the real reason for omission of the note was that Hume, confronted on all sides by prejudice and misunderstanding, finally gave up all hope of making his contemporaries see the import of his thoughts on religion.

> order to adapt our Religion, in some degree to human Infirmity; it is very difficult, & almost impossible, to prevent altogether the Intrusion of Superstition, or keep Men from laying too great Stress on the ceremonial & ornamental Parts of their Worship. Of all the Sects, into which Christians have been divided, the Church of England seems to have chosen the most happy Medium; yet will it undoubtedly be allowd, that during the Age, of which these Volumes treat, there was a Tincture of Superstition in the Partizans of the Hierarchy; as well as a strong Mixture of Enthusiasm in their Antagonists. But it is the Nature of the latter Principle soon to evaporate and decay; A spirit of Moderation usually succeeds, in a little time, to the Fervors of Zeal: And it must be acknowledg'd, to the Honour of the present Presbyterians, Independents, & other Sectaries of this Island, that they resemble in little more but in Name their Predecessors, who flourished during the civil Wars; & who were the Authors of such Disorder. It woud appear ridiculous in the Eyes of the judicious Part of Mankind to pretend that even the first Reformers in most Countries of Europe, did not carry Matters to a most violent Extreme, & were not, on many Occasions, liable to the Imputation of Fanaticism. Not to mention, that uncharitable Spirit, which Accompanied Zealots of all kind, & which led the early Reformers, almost universally, to inflict upon the Catholics, & on all who differed from them, the same Rigors, of which they themselves so loudly complaind.[1]

In Hume's estimation, then, the proper function of religion, as it exists in the modern world, is to purify the heart by the inculcation of morality and to secure strict obedience to the civil law. The thoughts expressed in the preface and in the second Volume of the History give evidence of the influence of the Moderates on Hume's thinking. He had seen considerably more of Robertson, Blair, Jardine, and John Home in the interval between the two publications. Greig suggests that although

> Hume never consciously reviewed his prejudices against the churches in the light of his increasing friendship with the Moderate group, . . . he could not but be influenced unconsciously. His language when he now came

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 306-307.

> to write about the various sects of Christianity was accordingly more temperate and less ironical.[1]

Hume had not been entirely uncompromising in his treatment of religion even in the first volume of the History. It was only when it became an obstruction to progress, and a breeder of civil turmoil, that he vented his wrath on it. When the actions of churchmen contributed to the cause of progress--i.e., public tranquillity, material well-being, culture, and virtue--Hume's attitude was both sympathetic and appreciative. It is true that he condemned all out-bursts of popular "frenzy," as he called it; and he was ever on the alert to discover the schemer behind the saint. He also lamented the tribute paid to the memory of "pretended saints" while there was a lack of regard for the man of genius and the wise legislator. But Hume was open-minded enough to recognize that often the clergy were the guardians of liberty and the protectors of society. When he was not dealing with those individuals whom he regarded as "enraged and fanatical reformers," Hume acknowledged that "the precious spark of liberty had been kindled and was preserved by the Puritans alone." "It is to them that the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution."[2]

Despite concessions to the value of religion here and there in the History, the work as a whole indicates the lack of personal religious faith on Hume's part. Consequently, he

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[1]Greig, op. cit., p. 217.

[2]David Hume, The History of England (New York & Chicago: Hooper, Clarke & Co., n.d.), III, 323.

was unable to understand the workings of the religious mind in history. Statements in connection with his treatment of the execution of Archbishop Laud show how completely Hume had reacted against the Calvinistic teaching of his early years.[1] Even though his association with the Moderates lessened his antipathy to churches and churchmen, he was still unable to give Christianity a prominent place among the forces shaping civilization. Proceedings in the ecclesiastical courts which were directly concerned with Hume's teaching did not help matters at all. In fact, Hume was driven further away from a proper understanding of religious experience as a result of attempts by the zealots to censure him.

Hume and the General Assembly

It is evident that quite apart from the first volume of the History, and indeed prior to its publication, David Hume was ill-treated by a goodly number of pious individuals in Edinburgh.[2] A restless feeling was stirring in religious circles because of the sceptical and irreligious tendencies manifested in Scotland. One author[3] describes this age as

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[1] Ibid., IV, 410.

[2] When Jardine, Blair, and Robertson together with Adam Smith and Alexander Wedderburn founded the Edinburgh Review in 1755, the most distinguished man of letters in Scotland--David Hume--was excluded from the venture. There was fear that his name would bring discredit on the Review and excite the pious against it. His recent History of the Stuarts passed unnoticed in its reviews. [Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 338.]

[3] John Campbell, The Lives of the Lord Chancellors and Keepers of the Great Seal of England, from the earliest times till the reign of King George IV (London: John Murray, 1847), VI, 18.

being in "a state of extraordinary ferment." Among Evangelical men, Hume came to be suspected and feared; he was unreservedly denounced as an evil influence. His sceptical attitude was resented with intense feeling and his association with the Moderates was taken as an attempt to undermine the religious earnestness for which the Scottish churchmen had been distinguished from the time of the Reformation. In the eyes of the Evangelicals Hume was the "arch-infidel"; to him they were the type of zealots which he greatly despised and strongly opposed in his writings. Hume was soon to be given fresh reason for hating clergymen of this disposition.

The trouble began with efforts in the Church to deal with some of the writings of the period. In 1751 Henry Home, Lord Kames, published Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion. The avowed purpose of the Essays was to refute Hume's Philosophical Essays and to vindicate religion or as the advertisement states: "to prepare the way for a proof of the Deity." But the book excited the anger of the zealots and Kames was charged with infidelity. Antagonists regarded his refutation as worthy of condemnation as well as the argument which he attempted to refute.[1] Hume and Kames, being the chief individuals who had ventured to commit their philosophical tenets to writing, were considered as the grand

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[1]Hume saw the consequences of Kames' Essays soon after their publication and wrote to Michael Ramsay: "Have you seen our Friend Harry's Essays? . . . Philosophers must judge of the question; but the Clergy have already decided it, & say he is as bad as me. Nay some affirm him to be worse, as much as a treacherous friend is worse than an open Enemy." [Letters, I, 162.]

apostles of infidelity. An attack, led by the Reverend George Anderson,[1] was made against Kames' Essays with the publication in 1753 of An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion, Personally and publicly stated: Illustrated with References to Essays on Morality and Natural Religion. Although aimed primarily at Lord Kames, this scurrilous production nevertheless had much to say about "his assistant David Hume Esq." The irascible, fiery Anderson attempted to brand with ecclesiastical censure the writings of the two Humes. He stated his purpose in writing An Estimate in the conclusion: "If religionists can do atheists no good, it is a duty incumbent upon all who believe in God the Father Almighty, to hinder these demented men from doing harm to others." Anderson suggested how this might be accomplished by proposing three questions for the consideration of the ministers of the Church of Scotland:

> I. Whether public teachers of atheism and infidelity are to be continued and acknowledged members of their church, or to be excommunicated?
> II. Supposing that it is their opinion that such ought to be excommunicated; whether the sentence ought to be pronounced by an inferior, or by the supreme church-judicature? The reason of this question is, that infidelity is offensive to all christians, and atheism to all that believe a God and a providence.
> III. Which is best and most expedient, to take the case of such doctors and teachers, residing within their

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[1] In 1755 Hume described this aged but vehement divine to Allan Ramsay as "the godly, spiteful, pious, splenetic, charitable, unrelenting, meek, persecuting, Christian, inhuman, peace-making, furious Anderson, [who] is at present very hot in pursuit of Lord Kames. He has lately wrote to his son, which they say is a curiosity. He mentions his own great age, which leaves him no hopes of being able long to survive the condemnation of that atheistical, however just, judge. He therefore leaves me as a legacy to his son, and conjures him, as he expects his blessing, or the blessing of Heaven, never to cease his pursuit of me till he bring me to condign punishment." [Letters, I, 224-225.]

> ecclesiastical jurisdiction, immediately into judicial consideration; or to delay for some time, (and how long?) in hopes of their coming to themselves, and of their spontaneous repenting and retracting their errors?[1]

The next assault came on May 23, 1755 with the appearance of An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the Writings of Sopho, and David Hume, Esq; Addressed to the consideration of the Reverend and Honourable Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.[2] The General Assembly is asked to consider:

> . . . the public attack which in this country has of late been made on the great principles and duties of natural and revealed religion, in the works of DAVID HUME, Esq.; and in the essays of an author who has been distinguished by the name of SOPHO. . . . But as I am well assured, that neither the art of the one, nor the power of the other, will avail to overthrow those principles they so boldly attack; so I am persuaded, that by neither will ye be diverted from doing your duty; and your duty unquestionably it is, to give warning of the poison contained in these volumes, and to testify to the whole Christian world your abhorrence of such principles.[3]

Hume is charged with having maintained:

> (1) All distinction betwixt virtue and vice is merely imaginary. (2) Justice has no foundation further than it contributes to public advantage. (3) Adultery is very lawful, but sometimes not expedient. (4) Religion and its ministers are prejudicial to mankind, and will always be

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[1] [George Anderson], An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion, Personally and publicly stated: Illustrated with Reference to Essays on Morality and Natural Religion (Edinburgh: 1753), pp. 389-391.

[2] This pamphlet, usually attributed to Anderson, was actually the work of the Reverend John Bonar, a member of the Evangelical Party. See Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 341.

[3] [John Bonar], An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the Writings of Sopho, and David Hume, Esq; Addressed to the consideration of the Reverend and Honourable Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: 1755), p. 2.

found either to run into the heights of superstition or enthusiasm. (5) Christianity has no evidence of its being a divine revelation. (6) Of all the modes of Christianity Popery is the best, and the reformation from thence was only the work of madmen and enthusiasts.[1]

These charges were answered by Hugh Blair in Observations upon a Pamphlet, intitled An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the writings of Sopho, and David Hume, Esq; &c.[2] His comment on the treatment afforded Hume is pertinent:

> Were the author of the Analysis to meet with no greater degree of candour than he has shewn to others; it were not unnatural to conclude, from his extracts from Mr. Hume, that his zeal for religion was more affected than real. Every fair reader must admit, and regret, that there are to be found in the writings of this elegant Author some principles by no means consistent with sound doctrine: There was therefore no necessity for ascribing to him positions which he does not advance, in order to support the charge of irreligion against him.[3]

Blair contends:

> Mr Hume's writings, to any candid reader, exhibit no defence of adultery; and are very far from containing any principles of licentiousness. Justice demands this acknowledgment as due to an elegant and agreeable writer, even though a Free-thinker; and it must at the same time be observed, that it appears very like a contradiction to accuse a man in one page of scepticism and infidelity, and in the following page to tax him with an attachment to Popery and superstition.
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> From the whole survey of this Analysis, the misrepresentations and false quotations contained in it are evident. . . .[4]

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[1] Ibid., quoted by Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 342.

[2] This pamphlet is attributed to Blair by Alexander F. Tytler, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames, (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1807), I, 142.

[3] [Hugh Blair], Observations upon a Pamphlet, intitled An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the Writings of Sopho, and David Hume, Esq; &c. (Edinburgh, 1755), pp. 22-23.

[4] Ibid., p. 27.

Other pamphlets appeared intended to inflame the public mind against Hume. One by Andrew Moir was entitled The Deist Stretched Upon a Death-Bed; Or a Lively Portraiture of a dying Infidel. Meantime the question of the infidelity of Hume and Kames had been referred to the Committee of Overtures in the 1755 General Assembly. The Moderates skillfully headed off a discussion and the Assembly contented itself with passing a pious resolution, expressed in general terms:

> The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland being filled with the deepest concern on account of the prevalence of Infidelity and Immorality, the principles whereof have been to the Disgrace of our Age and Nation, so openly avowed in several Books published of late in the Country and which are but too well known amonst us do therefore judge it proper and necessary for them to express the utmost abhorrence of those impious and infidel principles which are subversive of all Religion Natural and Revealed and have such pernicious Influence on life and morals, and they do earnestly recommend it to all the Ministers of this Church to exercise the Vigilance and to exert the Zeale which becomes their Character, to preserve those under their Charge from the Contagion of these abominable Tenets, and to Stir up in them a Solicitous concern, to guard against them, and against the Influence of these who are Infected with them.[1]

The whole situation seemed to give Hume very little disturbance, and he made light of it all. There is no mention of the proceedings in "My Own Life." His nonchalance over the matter is indicated in a letter to Allan Ramsay:

> They will not at once go to extremities with him Kames , and deliver him over to Satan, without any preparation or precaution. They intend to make him be prayed for in all the churches of Scotland during six months, after which, if he do not give signs of repentence he is to be held as anathema maranatha. . . . Meanwhile I am preparing for the Day of Wrath, and have already bespoken a number of

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[1] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 343.

> discreet families who have promised to admit me after I shall be excommunicated. . . .
> . . . The last Assembly sat on me. They did not propose to burn me, because they cannot. But they intend to give me over to Satan, which they think they have the power of doing. My friends, however, prevailed, and my damnation is postponed for a twelvemonth. But next Assembly will surely be upon me.[1]

Many, not content with the Assembly's general exhortation against infidelity, pressed the instituting of a formal process against David Hume. Again it was George Anderson who led the campaign for excommunication by publishing Infidelity a Proper Object of Censure (1756). The thesis of the pamphlet is stated in the sub-title: "Wherein is shewn, The indispensible Obligation that lies upon Church-rulers to exercise the Discipline instituted by Christ, upon such avowed Infidels as have been solemnly initiated Members of the Christian Church by Baptism; and, if irreclaimable, to cast them out of the Christian Society." Anderson was persistent in his demands and the zealots made a written overture for an inquiry into Hume's infidelity. Anderson proposed that a committee be appointed to inquire into the writings of Hume and that he be called before them at the next Assembly. The overture read:

> The General Assembly, judging it their duty to do all in their power to check the growth and progress of infidelity; and considering, that as infidel writings have begun of late years to be published in this nation, against which they have hitherto only testified in general, so there is one person, styling himself David Hume, Esq., who hath arrived at such a degree of boldness as publicly to avow himself the author of books containing the most rude and open attacks upon the glorious Gospel of Christ, and principles evidently subversive even of natural religion and the foundations of morality, if not establishing direct Atheism; therefore the Assembly appoint the following

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[1]Letters, I, 224.

> persons, - - - - , as a committee to inquire into the writings of this author, to call him before them, and prepare the matter for the next General Assembly.[1]

After a warm debate which lasted for two days, the Moderates succeeded in suppressing the overture by a vote of 50 to 19 before it left the committee. Hume was strongly defended by Alexander Wedderburn who at this time delivered his maiden speech before the Assembly.[2] Wedderburn opened by claiming extreme zeal for the "pure Presbyterian Church" and then advised the Assembly to dismiss the overture and trust to reason and Scripture for the refutation of Hume's errors of conduct and faith. It was pointed out that many presbyters had not read the writings in question, and those who had, did not understand or agree upon the interpretation of them. Therefore, they could not be properly judged. Furthermore, if Hume were summoned to argue, the Assembly could not be certain that he would not get the best of it. Wedderburn contended that the opinions in question were already universally detested and could not injure any one's faith. To carry out the overture would simply mean a process necessitating a prolonged and arduous inquiry. There was even some question about the justification of a punishment of metaphysical errors just as if they were moral delinquencies. Wedderburn argued that even if the charges were proven, nothing that the Assembly could do would be likely to convince Hume. A man who had all along withstood the subtlest reasonings of philosophers

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[1] Morren, Annals, II, 86-87.

[2] See John Campbell, op. cit., VI, 21-25.

and critics could not be forced to cry peccavi. If the Assembly were to pass the sentence of excommunication, Hume might snap his fingers and the Church could do nothing. Civil powers now refused to recognize this sentence and Hume could not even be forced to compear. Thus, Wedderburn concluded, no good purpose would be served by instituting a process against him. His prosecution could have but one result, namely, the increased sale of his books.

As a lawyer Wedderburn raised the question of the Assembly's right of jurisdiction in this affair. It was asserted that Hume did not even call himself a Christian.

> Why are you to summon him before you [Wedderburn contended] more than any Jew or Mohometan who may happen to be travelling within your bounds? Your libel, as we lawyers call it, is ex facie inept, irrelevant, and null, for it begins by alleging that the defender denies and disbelieves Christianity, and then it seeks to proceed against him and to punish him as a Christian. . . . For these reasons I move "That while all the members of the General Assembly have a just abhorrence of any doctrines or principles tending to infidelity or to the prejudice of our holy religion, that they drop the overture anent Mr David Hume, because it would not, in their judgment, minister to edification."[1]

Discussion seemed to turn on the question whether Hume was a Christian and amenable to the Courts of the Church. Those demanding a trial denied that he was outside the pale of the Church and not a subject for censure. The Evangelicals reminded the Assembly that he had been baptized by the Church and had never renounced his baptism. It was alleged that he frequently spoke in his books of "our holy religion." A further proof that Hume was still under the Assembly's

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[1] Ibid.

jurisdiction was the fact that professing Christians were known to hold voluntary communion with him, which it was evident they would not do if he were no Christian.

An account of the debates in the Committee of Overtures was made public in the June, 1756 issue of the Scots Magazine. In response to this prejudiced article, Robert Wallace composed his own account. He stated that he "was clearly of the opinion that those who contended against the Churches meddling in this matter had by far the better in the Debate."[1] This pamphlet gives the personal views of Wallace on the debate. He intended to give the public a more distinct view of the matter and to correct the mistakes of the Scots Magazine reviewer, whom he believed to follow Anderson. "The whole debate," Wallace claims, "turned on the necessity or expediency of inquiring into the writings of Mr Hume or calling the author before the Church Courts." The problem, then, became one of deciding whether Hume was capable of edification and whether proceedings should be instigated against him in particular.

Wallace indicates that the Moderates regarded the exercise of discipline against those who taught false or pernicious doctrines a means of edification and not a punishment.

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[1] Robert Wallace, "The necessity or expediency of the churches inquiring into the writings of David Hume Esquire and calling the Author to answer before the spiritual Courts. Considered with some reflections on Christians being occasionally in company with sceptical or Infidel Writers; In which there are some animadversions on the account in the Scotch Magazine for June, 1756, of the Debates in the Committee of overtures of the Generall Assembly 1756 concerning these subjects." Laing Manuscripts, II, 97, Edinburgh University Library.

They considered David Hume insusceptible of edification on the subject of religion. Public censure would not in any way change the mind of this subtle, sceptical philosopher. Wallace reasoned that if the doctrine of church censure is valid, then Hume should not be singled out for investigation. He asks:

> Why do not the Gentlemen who insist on this argument act impartially and carry it the full length it ought to go? Is he the only man who deserves such correction? . . . Are there not many criminalls in higher & lower life, vitious, immoral, and abandoned in their lives, Drunkards, revellers, whore-mongers, adulterers, contemners of Christian worship, dispisers of Christian Piety, open supporters of impious, lewd, and immoral Principles in Companies? . . . Why will they not therefore exercise Discipline impartially against all who in the abstract deserve high Censures according to the Christian law, or will they stop short att David Hume and a few calm, contemplative, wronghead writers?[1]

Wallace agreed that in one sense Hume, having never formally renounced his baptism, was still within the church; but, practically, he had done so in his writings. By his public utterances Hume had in effect already separated himself from the church, and "there can be no necessity nor advantage in ejecting such persons by a formall judgement." Technically, speaking, the church had lost its prerogative of questioning him.

Mossner thinks that "what especially piqued Wallace in the Hume affair of 1756 was the holier-than-thou attitude on the part of the rigidly righteous that a Christian minister must never so much as be seen in the company of unbelievers."[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Mossner, The Forgotten Hume, p. 119. [Cf. Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 350-351.]

Wallace was particularly disturbed by what he describes as the "impotent & ridiculous attack" upon the good character of certain clergymen "that they had been seen accidentally standing in the streets with Mr Hume or had been known to have been in companies where he was present, especially as this Gentleman, with all his errors, is confessed to be a very honest and benevolent man in common life & entertaining in Conversation."[1] Wallace avers that we need to distinguish between the immorality of the dissolute individual and the mistaken arguments of a serious thinker. Furthermore, he urges that

> The clergy need not be affraid to encounter Gentlemen of this sort [i.e., serious thinkers] be they ever so sceptical or heterodox. If we suppose that they are rather wrongheaded than wronghearted, that in their enquiries into nature & Philosophy they have been led into mistakes by some unlucky train of thinking, that they are far from rejoicing in such mistakes, that they secretly lament (which I know well is the case with some); if we suppose that they look upon themselves as unfortunate on this very account & are sorry they cannot have the same confortable view of nature and providence with other Gentlemen; if they are disposed to converse on these subjects with learned & ingenious men, 'twer pity to debarr them from the company of any of the Clergy with whom they would wish to converse.[2]

This passage indicates that Wallace had an insight into Hume's character and thinking on the subject of religion. If Hume knew of the defense made in his behalf, he might well have repeated his remark of a former time: "Mr Wallace's Conduct has been very noble & generous; & I am much oblig'd to him."[3]

The Wallace pamphlet provides valuable information concerning an interesting episode in Hume's life and shows the

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[1] Wallace, "The necessity or expediency of the churches inquiring into the writings of David Hume &c. . . ."

[2] Ibid.

[3] See supra, p. 257.

fairness and magnanimity of Wallace and the Moderates in the affair. After considerable debate the Moderates emerged victorious, convincing the committee that there was no propriety in proceeding against David Hume. The process was dismissed, the matter dropped, and he escaped the dangerous consequences of a clerical inquisition and church censure. Prudent reserve was maintained in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority, and the Moderates vindicated freedom of thought in the field of literature. Anderson, however, was indefatigable and unrelenting. As he found Hume and Kames above his reach, he resolved to proceed against humbler persons and lodged a complaint against Fleming, Kincaid, and Donaldson, the printers and publishers of Kames' book. Ten days before the meeting of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, the aged Anderson died, and the case was dismissed. By this time the pious Evangelicals had found another affair to consider,--the case of a Moderate clergyman, the Reverend John Home, who had written a play, and of Moderate clergymen who had compromised themselves by attending the public performances. The case of David Hume and Lord Kames was allowed to lag and the new campaign involved them only indirectly.[1]

Resumé

Opposition from clergymen and religious individuals accompanied Hume's successes in the realms of literature and public service. During the period of his life between 1745

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[1] See infra, pp. 297-302.

and 1757, Hume continued to be concerned with the problem of religion. He indicates his antagonism towards religious enthusiasts in a pamphlet written in behalf of his friend, Archibald Stewart. In the Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding, religious questions are explicitly discussed. In the essays "Of Miracles" and "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State," Hume makes it clear that he opposes a rationalistic treatment both of religion and of science. Deism is attacked and shown to rest on the feeble basis of mere reason. By means of the sceptical and critical method of the Enquiry, he attempts to clear the way for a science and religion based on human belief; faith, not reason, is the foundation of scientific and religious knowledge. Even the argument from design fails to give the kind of Deity required to satisfy the emotional nature of man.

The publication of these thoughts on religion brought Hume notoriety and the antagonism of many of the people within the Church. They considered him a destroyer of religious faith and morality, and Christian apologists began to think it necessary to bring out refutations of his irreligious principles. Hume's antipathy towards ministers was apparent in the Bellmen's Petition, and such anti-clerical zeal was a contributing factor in his failure to acquire an academic position in the University of Glasgow. Misunderstandings of his ideas and frustrations of his aspirations caused by opposition for religious reasons, caused Hume to begin the composition of the Dialogues. Up to this time he had said

very little about his own attitude towards divine realities. Now, with charges of infidelity, deism, and atheism facing him, he made an effort to eliminate the suspicions surrounding him. But even in this attempt he was foiled by his friends' advice against making his thoughts public.

Hume acquired the position of Librarian of the Faculty of Advocates, but not without a fight from the zealots. Friendship with a number of the Edinburgh Moderates benefitted him greatly and doubtlessly helped to influence him in the modification of his views on religion in the History, in which he had severely criticized Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism for causing disturbances in society. His correspondence with these ministers gives valuable information concerning his own attitude towards religion and the church. Hume agreed with the Moderates on the matter of church polity and argued for patronage in the Bellmen's Petition. When he held a place of authority in the government, he gave his assistance to these men. For him, as for them, the proper function of religion was the inculcation of morality and the securing of strict obedience to the civil law. Under the influence of the Moderates, Hume's statements on religion and clergymen became more temperate and less ironical in his later works.

It appears that Hume's lack of a personal religious faith made it difficult for him to understand the thoughts and actions of religious men, although he now and then praised clergymen who contributed to the cause of social progress. Consequently, he was prejudiced against Christianity as a

force for good in the world. The deep conflict between Hume and the Church of Scotland, between Hume and religion, came to a head when the Evangelical Party attempted to censure him; here was fresh reason for hating religious zealots. The incidents in the court proceedings of the General Assembly provide information for estimating the influences affecting Hume's attitude towards religion. Persecution by bigots was a vital circumstance preventing him from ever arriving at a real understanding of the religious affairs of others. His experience with the Church and the clergy and with religious individuals in general sufficed to make him a sceptic in this direction and aroused an antagonism towards religion which he never succeeded in overcoming.

CHAPTER VI

DAVID HUME - DISTINGUISHED WORLD CITIZEN, 1757-1776

Introduction

After the publication of the essay "Of Miracles" in 1748, Hume continued during the 1750's to work out the various applications of his philosophical principles in the religious realm. Due to the widespread opposition to his thought, he had difficulty in making public his philosophical and psychological investigations in the field of religion. In this final chapter we intend to point out Hume's attitude towards religion as it is manifested in his works of these years. He makes some of his most explicit statements on the subject in the "Natural History of Religion" and the posthumous Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. A perusal of these two works, which contain his most comprehensive and important contributions to the study of religion, aids in a proper understanding of his basic religious attitude.

As a distinguished world citizen, David Hume resided in Paris from 1763 to 1766, in London from 1767 to 1768, and in Edinburgh from 1769 until his death in 1776. Some consideration will be given to events of religious significance which occurred during these periods of his life. Relative to these years a number of anecdotes were recorded having to do with the disposition and social character of Hume. Many such stories concern his feelings about religion. Very few of these

have been included in this thesis because of the difficulty involved in establishing their veracity. Attention has been centered primarily on circumstances which are well substantiated.

Publication of Four Dissertations

In the year 1755 Hume wrote Andrew Millar:

> There are four short Dissertations, which I have kept some Years by me, in order to polish them as much as possible. One of them is that which Allan Ramsay mentioned to you. Another of the Passions; a third of Tragedy; a fourth, some Considerations previous to Geometry & Natural Philosophy.[1]

These four dissertations were probably composed sometime between 1749 and 1751. "Of the Passions" is a brief reworking of the second book of the Treatise. "Of Tragedy" is simply a short essay on the aesthetic problem of why grief in art is enjoyable. The "Considerations on Geometry and Natural Philosophy," presumably a reworking of Book I, Part II, of the Treatise, was never printed, and "Of the Standard of Taste" was finally substituted after two other essays--"Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul"--were suppressed. Having undergone revisions, the "Natural History of Religion"--the essay "Which Allan Ramsay mentioned"--appeared with the other three in 1757.

Friendly pressure as well as intimidation from official sources brought about the suppression of the two essays "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which were already in print when Hume sent orders to Millar for their cancellation.[2] Hume's own account of the episode appeared in

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[1] Letters, I, 223.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the suppression see E.C. Mossner, "Hume's Four Dissertations: An Essay in Biography," in Modern Philology, XLVII (1950), 37-57.

a letter dated January 25, 1772, to William Straham:

> . . . I am told by a Friend, that Dr Millar said to him, that there was a Bookseller in London, who had advertisd a new Book, containing, among other things, two of my suppress'd Essays. These I suppose are two Essays of mine, one on Suicide another on the Immortality of the Soul, which were printed by Andrew Millar about seventeen Years ago, and which from my abundant Prudence I suppress'd and would not now wish to have revivd. I know not if you were acquainted with this Transaction. It was this: I intended to print four Dissertations, the natural History of Religion, on the Passions, on Tragedy, and on the metaphysical Principles of Geometry. I sent them up to Mr Millar; but before the last was printed, I happend to meet with Lord Stanhope, who was in this Country, and he convinced me, that either there was some Defect in the Argument or in its perspicuity; I forget which; and I wrote to Mr Millar, that I would not print that Essay; but upon his remonstrating that the other Essays would not make a Volume, I sent him up these two, which I had never intended to have publishd. They were printed; but it was no sooner done than I repented; and Mr Millar and I agreed to suppress them at common Charges, and I wrote a new Essay on the Standard of Taste, to supply their place.[1]

At one time there was, in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, a bound copy of the proof-sheets of "Five Dissertations" to which had been added a note, signed "A. R." and believed to have been written by Allan Ramsay. T. H. Grose apparently saw this document when he was preparing his "History of the Editions" prefixed to Volume I of the Green and Grose edition of The Philosophical Works of David Hume. The note read in part: "This book contains a piece of Mr D. Hume's of which there is, I believe, but another copy existing. Having printed the volume as it here stands, Mr Hume was advised by a friend to suppress the Dissertation upon Suicide; which he accordingly did."[2] Ramsay's testimony indicates that the

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[1] Letters, II, 252-253.

[2] Quoted by T. H. Grose, in Philosophical Works of Hume, III, 47f.

suppression took place in two stages, "Of Suicide" preceding "Of the Immortality of the Soul" and that it was undertaken by Hume voluntarily after friendly persuasion.

Information from other sources gives a different side of the story. Hints of the suppression had reached Scotland as early as June, 1756 and were recorded by the Reverend George Ridpath in his diary: "Robert Turnbull . . . confirmed what Brown had before been telling me, that David Hume had got printed at London a Collection of Atheism which his bookseller Andrew Millar dares not sell."[1] In a letter written December 7, 1776 to Mrs. Elizabeth Montague, James Beattie made the following statement: "I know that Mr Hume printed two Essays, many years ago, one to prove the lawfulness of suicide, and the other to evince the mortality of the soul. These Essays were printed; but suppressed by the Bookseller, in consequence of a threatening message from the Lord Chancellor Hardwicke."[2] A writer in the Gentleman's Magazine for July, 1777, remarks, "If report says true, and sometimes it does, the Essay on Suicide had been published, and was suppressed by public authority."[3] More details are given in a later issue of this same periodical:

> These Essays ["Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul"] it is well known, were printed and advertised

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[1]George Ridpath, Diary of George Ridpath, ed. Sir James Balfour Paul (Edinburgh, 1922), p. 73.

[2]Beattie MSS, Aberdeen University Library, Quoted by Mossner, "Hume's Four Dissertations," p. 39b.

[3]"A Sketch of the Life of David Hume, Esq." in Gentleman's Magazine, LXVII (1777), 326.

> by Mr Millar, with some others by Mr Hume, near thirty years ago; but before the day of publication, being intimidated by threats of a prosecution, the bookseller called in some copies that he had dispersed, cancelled the two Essays, and (with difficulty) prevailed on Mr Hume to substitute some others less obnoxious.[1]

Further valuable evidence of public intimidation comes from the letters of William Warburton, who had been vexing Hume ever since 1749. Warburton's unprinted letter of February 14, 1756, to the Reverend Thomas Balguy provides the earliest known reference to the suppression:

> Hume has printed a small Vol: which is suppressed, & perhaps forever,--on the origin of Religion, on the Passions, on suicide, & on the immortality. The Vol. was put into my hands & I found it as abandoned of all virtuous principle, as of all philosophic force.--I believe he was afraid of a prosecution, & I believe he would have found one: For the Attorney is now in a disposition to support the religious principles of Society, and with vigour.--He finds a generous connivance, infamously abused--and the other day he told me, he was going to support & defend us.--I said it was high time.[2]

Warburton's version is substantiated by William Rose, one of the editors of the Monthly Review:

> The Writer of this article knows that the essays here mentioned ["Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul"] were written by Mr. Hume. That almost thirty years ago they made a part of a volume, which was publicly advertised to be sold by Mr. Millar; that, before the day fixed for publication, several copies were delivered to some of the Author's friends, who were impatient to see whatever came from his pen; that a noble Lord, still living threatened to prosecute Mr. Millar, if he published the essays now before us; that the Author, like a bold veteran, in the cause of infidelity, was not in the least intimidated by this menace, but that the poor bookseller was terribly frightened, to such a degree, that he called in all the copies he had delivered, cancelled the two essays,

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[1] Ibid., LIV (1784), 607.

[2] Quoted by Mossner, "Hume's Four Dissertations," p. 40 a & b. Also in The Life of David Hume, p. 323.

> and with some difficulty, prevailed upon Mr. Hume to substitute some other pieces in the room of those objected to by the noble Lord; that, by some means or other, however, a few copies got abroad, and have been clandestinely circulated. . . .[1]

In suppressing "the two obnoxious Dissertations,"[2] and toning down some parts of the "Natural History of Religion,"[3] Hume acted with characteristic wisdom and prudence. He desired neither unpleasant notoriety nor martyrdom, and it was at this time that the General Assembly was contemplating the possible investigation of David Hume as an infidel writer. If the "Five Dissertations" had been suppressed by public order in London, the Scottish Highflyers would have had significant testimony against him, and it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for his Moderate friends to defend him. For these reasons, it was not too difficult to persuade Hume to give in. The publication of the altered work was prudently delayed until the beginning of 1757 at which time he wrote Adam Smith:

> I have got down a few copies of my Dissertations lately publish'd at London; & shall send you one by the first Glasgow waggon. I beg of you to do me the Favor of accepting this Trifle. You have read all the Dissertations in Manuscript; but you will find that on the natural History of Religion somewhat amended in point of Prudence. I do not apprehend, that it will much encrease the Clamour against me.[4]

Hume was still concerned about the proceedings of the General Assembly against him and asked Smith:

> Did you ever hear of such Madness & Folly as our Clergy have lately fallen into? For my Part, I expect that the

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[1] William Rose, Article in Monthly Review, LXX (1784), 427.

[2] Letters, I, 444. [3] Letters, I, 245. [4] Letters, I, 245.

> next Assembly will very solemnly pronounce the Sentence of Excommunication against me: But I do not apprehend it to be a Matter of any Consequence. What do you think?[1]

Hume expected further attention from the Church courts, and for some time deplored the restrictive attitude of his native countrymen towards men of letters. In 1759 he made the following statement to Adam Smith: "Scotland suits my Fortune best,& is the Seat of my Principal Friendships; but it is too narrow a Place for me, and it mortifies me that I sometimes hurt my Friends."[2] Here was a sober evaluation of the facts; Hume desired to live in tranquillity in Edinburgh, but religious bigots made it increasing difficult for him and his friends.

Prior to publication, a copy of Four Dissertations came into the hands of William Warburton. Even with the omission of the two essays and the revision of some passages of the "Natural History of Religion," Warburton was not satisfied and tried to influence Millar for a second suppression:

> Sir, I supposed you would be glad to know what sort of book it is which you are about to publish with Hume's name and yours to it. The design of the first essay that on natural religion is the very same with all Lord Bolingbroke's, to establish naturalism, a species of atheism, instead of religion: and he employs one of Bolingbroke's capital arguments for it. All the difference is, it is without Bolingbroke's abusive language.
>
> All the good his mutilation and fitting it up for the public has done, is only to add to its other follies, that of contradiction. He is establishing atheism; and in one single line of a long essay professes to believe Christianity. All this I shall show in a very few words in a proper occasion.
>
> In the meantime, if you think you have not money enough, and can satisfy your conscience, you will do well to publish it; for there is no doubt of the sale among a people so feverish, that to-day they burn with superstition, and tomorrow freeze with atheism. But the day of the publication

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[1] Letters, I, 246. [2] Letters, I, 314.

> and the fast day will be in admirable contrast to one another.
>
> I dare say you knew nothing of the contents; but the caution of poor Mr. K was admirable on a like occasion with this very man, Hume. He wrote to Mr. K. to offer him a copy, that had nothing to do with religion, as he said. Mr. K. replied, that might be; but as he had given great offence, and he (Mr. K.) was himself no judge of these matters, he desired to be excused.
>
> You have often told me of this man's moral virtues.. He may have many, for aught I know; but let me observe to you, there are vices of the mind as well as of the body; and I think a wickeder mind, and more obstinately bent on public mischief, I never knew.[1]

Millar was not to be intimidated this time, and the book finally appeared February 7, 1757. Warburton informed his friend Richard Hurd:

> There is an epidemic madness amongst us; today we burn with the feverish heat of Superstition; tomorrow we stand fixed and frozen in Atheism. Expect to hear that the churches are all crowded next Friday; and that on Saturday they buy up Hume's new Essays; the first of which (and please you) is The natural History of Religion; for which I will trim the rogue's jacket, at least sit upon his skirts, as you will see when you come hither, and find his margins scribbled over. In a word, the Essay is to establish an Atheistic naturalism, like Bolingbroke's capital arguments, that Idolatry and Polytheism were before the worship of one God. It is full of absurdities: and here I come in with you; for they show themselves knaves: but, as you will observe, to do their business, is to shew them fools.[2]

Warburton's answer took the form of a letter addressed to himself, but Hurd had a considerable hand in the composition. Warburton, speaking of the work, wrote to Hurd:

> It will make no more than a pamphlet; but you shall take your own time, and make it your Summer's amusement, if you will. I propose it to bear something like this title, Remarks on Mr. Hume's late Essay, called the Natural History

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[1] Warburton, Unpublished Papers, pp. 309-310.

[2] Warburton, Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate, pp. 238-239.

> of Religion, by a Gentleman of Cambridge, in a Letter to the Rev. Dr. Warburton. . . . The address will remove it from me: the author, a Gentleman of Cambridge, from you; and the secrecy in printing, from us both.[1]

The pamphlet is full of abusive language and speaks of Hume as "a puny Dialectician from the North . . . who came to the attack with a beggarly troop of routed sophisms."[2] It is remembered today solely as causing Hume's famous retort in "My Own Life," concerning the publication of the "Natural History of Religion."

> Its public Entry was rather obscure, except only that Dr Hurd wrote a Pamphlet against it, with all the illiberal Petulance, Arrogance, and Scurrility, which distinguishes the Warburtonian School. This Pamphlet gave me some consolation for the otherwise indifferent Reception of my Performance.[3]

A recent biographer of Warburton concurs in this judgment against him:

> When we read these contemptuous words today, and contrast the influence that the writings of the two men [Hume and Warburton] have had upon the opinions of mankind it is almost impossible to understand how Warburton could have adopted an attitude of arrogant superiority so ludicrously

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[1] Ibid., pp. 240-241.

[2] [William Warburton and Richard Hurd], Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion in the Works of the Right Reverend William Warburton, D. D. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), XII, 341-376.

[3] Letters, I, 5. Near the close of his life Hume wrote of Warburton that "He and all his gang, the most scurrilous, arrogant, and impudent Fellows in the World, have been abusing me in their usual style these twenty Years. . .. It is petulance, and Insolence and abuse, that distinguish the Warburtonian School, even above all other Parsons and Theologians. Johnson is abusive in Company, but falls much short of them in his writings. I remember Lord Mansfield said to me that Warburton was a very opposite man in company to what he is in his Books; then, replyd I, he must be the most agreeable companionin Europe, for surely he is the most odious Writer." [Letters, II, 244.]

unwarranted. The only explanation is his manifest sincerity.[1]

Hume saw through the anonymity of the attack and linked together the names of Hurd and Warburton.[2] He determined with himself not to answer their objections and wrote William Strahan:

> I am positive not to reply a single Word to Dr Hurd; and I also beg of you not to think of it. His Artifices or Forgeries, call them which you please, are such common things in all Controversy that man woud be ridiculous who woud pretend to complain of them; and the Parsons in particular have got a License to practice them. I therefore beg of you again to let the Matter pass over in Silence.[3]

Hume summarizes his position in the matter in a letter to Andrew Millar:

> As to my Opinions, you know I defend none of them positively: I only propose my Doubts, where I am so unhappy as not to receive the same Conviction with the rest of Mankind. It surprizes me much to see any body, who pretends to be a man of Letters, discover Anger on that Account; since it is certain, by the Experience of all Ages, that nothing contributes more to the Progress of Learning than such Disputes & Novelties.
>
> Apropos to Anger, I am positively assurd, that Dr Warburton wrote that Letter to himself which you sent me; and indeed the Style discovers him sufficiently. I shou'd answer him; but he attacks so small a Corner of my Building, that I can abandon it without drawing great Consequences after it. If he woud come into the Field, and dispute concerning the principal Topics of my Philosophy, I shou'd probably accept the Challenge. At present nothing coud tempt me to take the Pen in hand, but Anger, of which I feel myself incapable, even upon this Provocation.[4]

One further feature of the publication of Four Dissertations remains to be noticed--the dedication "To the Reverend

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[1] A. W. Evans, Warburton and the Warburtonians, A Study in Some Eighteenth-Century Controversies (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 214.

[2] Letters, I, 5. [3] Letters, I, 252. [4] Letters, I, 265.

Mr. Hume, Author of Douglas, a Tragedy." David Hume found himself involved in a controversy raging in Scotland over the activities of the Reverend John Home as an author of plays and a frequenter of playhouses. The Edinburgh Evangelicals furiously opposed all drama as a delusion of Satan and began to criticize Home for composing the tragedy Douglas. His opponents demanded punishment for his blasphemous play and "formal accusations were instituted in Edinburgh, not only against John Home, but also against Alexander Carlyle and others for merely having attended performances."[1] Hume and some of the Moderate clergy regarded the play as a wonderful addition to dramatic literature. The Church became divided over the issue and the two groups began to assail each other with sermons and pamphlets. On the one side were the liberal-minded and fashionable; on the other, the whole body of the evangelical clergy supported by some of the civil authorities. The Moderates were not entirely agreed as to the question of Christians attending plays, but many of them extolled John Home's Douglas. The zealots damned the play as blasphemous and designated the stage as "satan's school."[2]

A battle was on between the Highflyers and the Moderates. The controversy involved David Hume in two ways; first, as the literary patron of John Home; and second, as the

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 360.

[2]Mathieson, The Awakening of Scotland, p. 164. See John Witherspoon, "A Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage," in The Works of John Witherspoon (Edinburgh: Ogle & Aikman; J. Pillans & Sons; J. Ritchie; and J. Turnbull, 1804-1805), VI, 34-128.

intimate and supposedly "infidel" friend of a number of the Moderate ministers. Not being personally concerned with the Church's turmoil, Hume could maintain a detached attitude. But he resented the treatment meted out to John Home and rushed publicly to Home's defense by dedicating the Four Dissertations to him. The dedication was an attack upon intolerance and narrow-mindedness as expressed in the Scottish ministers who objected to plays on religious grounds and in the English producers who had refused to stage the Douglas in London. Hume writes:

> It was the practice of the antients to address their compositions only to friends and equals, and to render their dedications monuments of regard and affection, not of servility and flattery. In those days of ingenuous and candid liberty, a dedication did honour to the person to whom it was addressed, without degrading the author. If any partiality appeared towards the patron, it was at least the partiality of friendship and affection.
>
> Another instance of true liberty, of which antient times can alone afford us an example, is the liberty of thought, which engaged men of letters, however different in their abstract opinions, to maintain a mutual friendship and regard; and never to quarrel about principles, while they agreed in inclinations and manners. Science was often the subject of disputation, never of animosity.
>
> I have been seized with a strong desire of renewing these laudable practices of antiquity, by addressing the following dissertations to you, my good friend: For such I will ever call and esteem you, notwithstanding the opposition, which prevails between us, with regard to many of our speculative tenets. These differences of opinion I have only found to enliven our conversation; while our common passion for science and letters served as a cement to our friendship. I still admired your genius, even when I imagined, that you lay under the influence of prejudice; and you sometimes told me, that you excused my errors, on account of the candor and sincerity, which, you thought, accompanied them.[1]

Matters were stirred up even more by the inexpediency

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[1] G. G., IV, 439-440.

of the dedication, and the result was a further inflaming of the fanatics. Hume was forced to admit to Millar:

> The Dedication of my Dissertations to Mr Hume was shown to some of his Friends here, Men of very good Sense, who were seiz'd with an Apprehension, that it wou'd hurt that Party in the Church, with which he had always been connected, and wou'd involve him, and them of Consequence, in the Suspicion of Infidelity. Neither he nor I were in the least affected with their Panic; but to satisfy them we agreed to stand by the Arbitration of one Person, of great Rank & of known Prudence; and I promis'd them to write to you to suspend the Publication for one Post, in case you shou'd have resolv'd to publish it presently.[1]

The Moderates desired to help John Home and feared that the dedication would arouse suspicions of infidelity. On their advice, Hume temporarily suppressed the publication. However, he apparently knew of John Home's intention to give up his clerical career for that of a man of letters.[2] Hume indicates his determination to print the dedication in a letter to William Strahan:

> You will see by my Letter to Mr Millar that I mention a Dedication, which may perhaps surprize you, as I never dealt in such servile Addresses; But I hope it will not surprize you, when you hear it is only to a Presbyterian Minister, my Friend, Mr Hume, the Author of Douglas. I was resolv'd to do what lay in my power to enable a Youth of Genius to surmount the unaccountable Obstacles, which were thrown in his Way. You will probably see it published in a few Days. I hope the Goodness of the Intention will apologize for the Singularity of the undetaking [sic] .[3]

After the publication of the Four Dissertations Hume

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[1] Letters, I, 239-240.

[2] Home did in fact resign from the ministry rather than risk deposition by the Highflyers. He left his charge at Athelstaneford and went to London where he soon became the secretary of Lord Bute. See Henderson, Religious Controversies, pp. 65-86.

[3] Letters, I, 241.

complained to William Mure:

> Pray, whether do you pity or blame me most, with regard to this Dedication of my Dissertations to my Friend, the Poet? I am sure I never executed any thing, which was either more elegant in the Composition, or more generous in the Intention: Yet such an Alarm seiz'd some Fools here (Men of very good Sense, but Fools in that Particular) that they assaild both him & me with the utmost violence; and engag'd us to change our Intention. I wrote to Millar to suppress that Dedication: Two Posts after I retracted that Order. Can any thing be more unlucky, than that in the Interval of these four days, he shoud have opend his Sale, & dispos'd of 800 Copies; without that Dedication, whence, I imagin'd, my Friend wou'd reap some advantage, & myself so much Honor. I have not been so heartily vexd at any Accident of a long time. However, I have insisted that the Dedication shall still be publish'd.[1]

It is not difficult to see why alarm seized the Moderates. John Home was still a minister and in conflict with the Highflyers. Hume "the Atheist" had narrowly escaped excommunication from the Church the year before the publication of the Four Dissertations. He could hardly be regarded as a helpful or desirable ally in the battle against those who opposed the drama. In point of fact the fanatics took advantage of Hume's relations with the Moderates and regularly taunted them for keeping company with an open and avowed infidel. Hume's notoriety in religion was used by the Highflyers to discredit the Moderate party. This attack by association took the form of broadsides and pamphlets both farcical and serious.[2] The Four Dissertations received wide publicity with the zealots spreading rumors concerning the affair of the suppressed dissertations of 1756. David Hume received a great deal of

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[1] Letters, I, 242-243.

[2] See Morren, op. cit., II, 112-130; Mossner, "Four Dissertations," pp. 46b-47b; Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 365-369.

personal abuse in these "paper-bullets" of controversy which were "flying with great vehemence,"[1] but he bore the ordeal with equanimity, endeavoring to uphold the position which he considered to be right.

It remains for us to mention briefly the teaching of David Hume in the three controversial works on religion in "Five Dissertations." The two suppressed essays need not delay us long. They are simply popular exemplifications of implicit principles in Hume's general thought on the subject. The opening statement of the essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul" provides the main thesis of the work:

> By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the Immortality of the Soul. The arguments for it are commonly derived either from metaphysical topics, or moral, or physical. But in reality, it is the gospel, and the gospel alone, that has brought life and immortality to light.[2]

Hume contends: "Our insensibility before the composition of the body seems to natural reason a proof of a like state after dissolution."[3] The essay is concluded with the following words:

> By what arguments or analogies can we prove any state of existence, which no one ever saw, and which no way resembles any that ever was seen? Who will repose such trust in any pretended philosophy as to admit upon its testimony the reality of so marvellous a scene? Some new species of logic is requisite for that purpose, and some new faculties of the mind, that they may enable us to comprehend that logic.
>
> Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to Divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth.[4]

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[1] Dempster, op. cit., p. 28. [2] G. G., IV, 399.

[3] G. G., IV, 406. [4] G. G., IV, 406.

Here again is another thrust at Christian revelation. Hume makes his position quite clear--religious beliefs can never be substantiated by reason. He did not refrain from fleering at the Christians of his day who attempted to place Divine revelation on a rationalistic foundation. It is true that he suffered much provocation to make such derogatory statements; nevertheless, the omission of these paragraphs would have strengthened rather than detracted from his argument.

In the essay on "Suicide" Hume advocates a philosophical theism and asserts: "One considerable advantage that arises from philosophy, consists in the sovereign antidote which it affords to superstition and false religion."[1] He argues the incapacity of man to commit any act against the will of Providence and contends that there is out-and-out superstition and even blasphemy in the notion that an individual cannot curtail his misery by suicide as well as by any other act that Deity has put in his power.[2] In a footnote Hume adds that the action is not prohibited in the Scriptures.[3] In short, he believed that the ancient philosophers held more tenable views on the subject than the Christians. He concluded that suicide need not be regarded as an injury to God, to our neighbor, or the society at large.[4]

"The Natural History of Religion" is the source of much information concerning Hume's attitude towards religious faith and reverence. Besides showing how he occupied himself

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[1]G. G., IV, 407. [2]G. G., IV, 410-411.

[3]G. G., IV, 414n. [4]G. G., IV, 413.

with the problems of religion, the essay gives some indications of his personal faith and together with the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion constitutes his only sustained contributions to the theory of religion. At the outset he states the distinction between two sorts of inquiry bearing on religion: "As every inquiry which regards religion is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular which challenge our attention, to wit, that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature."[1] With regard to the first inquiry he is perfectly explicit:

> Happily, the first question, which is the most important, admits of the most obvious, at least the clearest solution. The whole frame of nature bespeaks an Intelligent Author; and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.[2]

Hume assumes the validity of philosophical theism in the form of the argument from design. But acceptance of this argument is neither the origin of religion nor the factor which has led men to accept theism. Theism must have an origin that is different from the rational arguments formulated in its support. It is the second inquiry, concerning the origin of religion in human nature, that Hume now proposes to pursue. The title of the essay was intended to show that he meant to examine the psychological bases of religion and not the abstract rational proofs of theism. He makes this clear in the

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[1] G. G., IV, 309.

[2] G. G., IV, 309. The speculative aspects of religion are discussed in detail in the Dialogues. See infra, pp.337ff.

introduction:

> . . . the other question, concerning the origin of religion in human nature, is exposed to some more difficulty. The belief of an invisible intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages; but it has neither perhaps been so universal as to admit of no exceptions, nor has it been, in any degree, uniform in the ideas which it has suggested. Some nations have been discovered, who entertained no sentiments of Religion, if travellers and historians may be credited; and no two nations, and scarce any two men, have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiment. It would appear, therefore, that this preconception springs not from an original instinct or primary impressions of nature, such as gives rise to self-love, affection between the sexes, love of progeny, gratitude, resentment; since every instinct of this kind has been found absolutely universal in all nations and ages, and has always a precise determinate object which it inflexibly pursues. The first religious principles must be secondary, such as may easily be perverted by various accidents and causes, and whose operation, too, in some cases, may, by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, be altogether prevented. What those principles are, which give rise to the original belief, and what those accidents and causes are, which direct its operations, is the subject of our present inquiry.[1]

Although Hume dealt primarily with the historical and psychological aspects of religion by analyzing the origin and gradual development of the religions of the world into new and ever-changing types, the "Natural History of Religion" contains various statements relative to his personal religious convictions. He repeats and emphasizes the paramount thesis of his philosophy, that is, the essential a-rationality of human nature. Religious beliefs, Hume teaches, originate independently of reason. As a natural product of the human mind, religion has its basis in human nature--not in its rational, but in its sensuous side; not in the speculative desire for knowledge, but in practical needs; not in the

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[1] G. G., IV, 309.

contemplation of nature, but in looking forward with fear or joy to the changing events of life.[1] Man's early approach to religion, as manifested in polytheism or idolatry,[2] was not philosophical or scientific but was due to hope and anxiety regarding "life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want."[3] Passions, emotions, sentiments precede reason and philosophy in human nature and always remain dominant. The origin or cause of religion lies in the hopes and fears "which actuate the mind" and in "a concern with regard to the events of life."[4] Religion arises when the passions become linked up with a special object--invisible, intelligent power.[5]

Polytheism antedates monotheism and even after the general acceptance of philosophy survives in the popular mentality.[6] The philosophical knowledge of God is a very late product of mature reflection. Theism is an advanced concept far beyond the primitive or popular mind in early or in later ages.[7] Primitive religion was superstition of an anthropomorphic cast.[8] The human mind, ruled by hopes and fears, created a religion of multifarious outside controlling forces; the gods of man's early religion were like "the elves and fairies of our ancestors"--atheistic in character.[9] Hume traces theism from these atheistic gods as it rises out of polytheism by the perception of the unity of design in nature.[10] Monotheism

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[1] G. G., IV, 315. [2] G. G., IV, 310. [3] G. G., IV, 316.
[4] G. G., IV, 315-316. [5] G. G., IV, 317; 335.
[6] G. G., IV, 210; 325. [7] G. G., IV, 328. [8] G.G., IV, 325-27.
[9] G. G., IV, 320-324. [10] G. G., IV, 330.

as a popular religion did not arise from rational reflection, although its chief principles are in agreement with the results of philosophy, but from the same irrational motives as polytheism.[1]

As a critic Hume was conscious of the inconsistencies, superstitions, and immoralities appearing under the name of religion. In carrying out his enquiry, he has much to say regarding the superstition and fanaticism which have appeared in the natural history of religion. He freely castigated these evils and often indulges in offensive language which called forth adverse criticism from the friends of evangelical religion.[2] Hume undertakes an historical comparison of polytheism and monotheism[3] and discovers that, although Christianity is in its popular forms definitely theistic, theism is not in every respect the best religion. On the whole, polytheism is bad philosophy whereas monotheism is good; but when the two religious forms are compared in respect to tolerance and the courage or heroism they each develop, monotheism is inferior. Theism is not only intolerant but also tends to make its followers pusillanimous. The "monkish virtues" of submission and abasement overwhelm individual and national courage. Furthermore, theism's incomprehensible dogmas put faith to very severe tests, and reason itself is often travested. This last evil, however, is also found in polytheism. Most of the adherents of all popular religion exalt belief in foolish

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[1] G. G., IV, 329-330. [2] G. G., IV, 335-361.

[3] G. G., IV, 335-336.

mysteries, fanaticism, and the observance of customs above the practice of virtue.[1]

In theism, Hume claims, the very reasonableness of the fundamental assumptions was a temptation to enter into an alliance with philosophy and to ruin the philosophy of the subject by turning it into popular theology. Often, in order that mystery and amazement might not be banished, the advocates of theism look for "whichever opinion" is most contrary to plain sense."[2] Reason aids in drawing the logical consequences of dogmas, but over the dogmas reason itself has no control. Should it attempt to question these articles, the reproach of heresy always rests on the side of reason. "It is thus a system becomes more absurd in the end, merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning."[3] Hume is here repeating a concept expressed in the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding: "This pertinacious bigotry, of which you complain, as so fatal to philosophy, is really her offspring, who, after allying with superstition, separates himself entirely from the interest of his parent, and becomes her most inveterate enemy and persecutor."[4] The "fanatical," "intolerant," "grotesque," "scholastic" popular religion is the monstrous, deformed offspring of reason and superstition.

But even more general and more immediately operative are the sins of religion in the moral sphere. All popular religions as distinct from philosophical religions have baleful

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[1] G. G., IV, 337-339. [2] G. G., IV, 341-342.

[3] G. G., IV, 342. [4] E., 133.

effects on morality. By a spreading corruption in what was best, "virtue, knowledge, love of liberty, are the qualities which call down the fatal vengeance of inquisitors, and, when expelled, leave the society in the most shameful ignorance, corruption, and bondage."[1] Conceptions of the Divine Nature which arise in most of these religions have a bad influence on morals. There is a tendency, characteristic of the traditional religions, to multiply new and frivolous species of merit, in the observance of rites or in the holding of abstruse beliefs. These religious duties are treated as being of higher value than the duties of everyday life and thus divide man's attention and weaken his attachment to the natural motives of justice and humanity.[2] The outward religious observances followed in various rites and ceremonies Hume regards as the less dangerous side of religion. It is the very essence of religion--inner religious obligations--which he furiously denounces. The cultivation of certain feelings and the holding of certain beliefs become the source of much insincerity. These obligations cannot be voluntarily fulfilled but depend upon "Grace." Professions of belief are falsely made and result in the vice of hypocrisy, affecting the whole character. Hume treats religious belief at its best as never more than half-belief or make-belief treated as religious duty.

> We may observe, that, notwithstanding the dogmatical, imperious style of all superstition, the conviction of the religionists, in all ages, is more affected than real, and scarcely ever approaches, in any degree, to that solid belief and persuasion which governs us in the

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[1] G. G., IV, 339.

[2] G. G., IV, 342 sqq.

> common affairs of life. Men dare not avow, even to their own hearts, the doubts which they entertain on such subjects: They make a merit of implicit faith, and disguise to themselves their real infidelity, by the strongest asseverations and most positive bigotry. But nature is too hard for all their endeavours, and suffers not the obscure, glimmering light, afforded in those shadowy regions, to equal the strong impressions made by common sense and by experience. The usual course of men's conduct belies their words, and shows that their assent in these matters is some unaccountable operation of the mind between disbelief and conviction, but approaching much nearer to the former than to the latter.[1]

Hume maintains that all popular religions, whether "traditional or mythological," or "systematic or scholastic" tended to become both impious and wicked.[2] The apprehensive and gloomy religions extol in the Deity actions they would condemn in their fellow creatures. "It is certain," Hume contends, "that in every religion, however sublime the verbal definition which it gives of its divinity, many of the votaries, perhaps the greatest number, will still seek the divine favour, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous ecstacies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions."[3] It is the philosophic duty to combat all these influences which so degrade human nature. The general infirmity of the mind is such that this is possible only for the few, and it is precariously maintained even by them.

> Whatever weakens or disorders the internal frame, promotes the interests of superstition: And nothing is more destructive to them, than a manly, steady virtue, which either

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[1] G. G., IV, 347-348. [2] G. G., IV, 352-354.

[3] G. G., IV, 355.

> preserves us from disastrous melancholy accidents or teaches us to bear them. During such calm sunshine of the mind, these spectres of false divinity never make their appearance.[1]

Throughout the discussion of the history of religion, Hume inclines towards a theistic position even though its intellectual form is speculative and nebulous. In Section I he affirms:

> The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection: And slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much elevated and refined, to its divinity. Nothing could disturb this natural progress of thought, but some obvious and invincible argument, which might immediately lead the mind into the pure principles of theism, and make it overleap, at one bound, the vast interval which is interposed between the human and the Divine Nature. But though I allow, that the order and frame of the universe, when accurately examined, affords such an argument, yet I can never think, that this consideration could have an influence on mankind, when they formed their first rude notions of religion.[2]

At the beginning of Section II Hume asserts: "Were men led into the apprehension of invisible, intelligent power, by a contemplation of the works of nature, they could never possibly entertain any conception but of one single being, who bestowed existence and order on this vast machine, and adjusted all its parts, according to one regular plan or connected system."[3] In regard to the relation of religion and morality Hume suggests that "the most genuine method of serving the Divinity is by promoting the happiness of his creatures."[4]

In the closing section Hume reiterates the argument

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[1] G. G., IV, 359. [2] G. G., IV, 311. [3] G. G., IV, 313.

[4] G. G., IV, 357.

from design:

> A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in every thing; and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author. The uniform maxims too, which prevail throughout the whole frame of the universe, naturally, if not necessarily, lead us to conceive this intelligence as single and undivided, where the prejudices of education oppose not so reasonable a theory. Even the contrarieties of nature, by discovering themselves every where, become proofs of some consistent plan, and establish one single purpose or intention, however inexplicable and incomprehensible.[1]

Hume declares that "the good, the great, the sublime, the ravishing are found eminently in the genuine principles of theism." The belief in a Supreme Being, "if not an original instinct, being at least a general attendant of human nature, may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the Divine workman has set upon his work; and nothing surely can more dignify mankind, than to be thus selected from all other parts of creation, and to bear the image or impression of the universal Creator."[2]

Hume's presentation of the various historical forms of religion shows that the nature ascribed to Divine power varies with man's intellectual development and knowledge of events. It is on this side that reason comes in and plays an important part in religion by discovering what is relevant and beneficial. But, just as is the case with belief in an external world, reason and critical reflection cannot destroy the fundamental belief in the object of religion but must always rest upon it. Hume quotes with approval Bacon's statement:

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[1] G. G., IV, 360. [2] G. G., IV, 361.

"A little philosophy makes men Atheists: A great deal reconciles them to religion."[1] Philosophy not only makes men sceptical but also leads them to atheism. But scepticism and atheism will not stand examination; in fact, each derives its strength from the belief which it would overthrow. A little more philosophy leads back to belief and to theism.

Without disputing the force of the argument from design, Hume concludes:

> What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the knowledge of the Supreme Being; and, from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its Supreme Creator! But turn the reverse of the medal. Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are anything but sick men's dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkeys in human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical asseverations of a being who dignifies himself with the name of rational.
>
> Hear the verbal protestations of all men: Nothing so certain as their religious tenets. Examine their lives: You will scarcely think that they repose the smallest confidence in them.
>
> The greatest and truest zeal gives us no security against hypocrisy: The most open impiety is attended with a secret dread and compunction.
>
> No theological absurdities so glaring that they have not sometimes been embraced by men of the greatest and most cultivated understanding. No religious precepts so rigorous that they have not been adopted by the most voluptuous and most abandoned of men.[2]

The ending of the "Natural History of Religion" is in a sense a confession of Hume's personal faith. He is in favor of religion in general but against the exclusive claim of any one type or form of it. He maintained his conviction in the inherent value of religion, even while tracing the

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[1] G. G., IV, 329. [2] G. G., IV, 362-363.

inconsistencies which appear in its history among the several nations. Hume's intellectual and emotional characteristics induced him to treat scornfully these inconsistencies which he regarded as traces of hypocrisy. He seems to be advocating a true or philosophical religion, although even in the true religion, much remains obscure. The difficulty of coming to any definite conclusions, except a very general one, along with the inconsistencies between the opinions and the practices of mankind in reference to religion, led Hume to exclaim:

> The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject.[1]

He seems glad to escape from the realms of conflict and debate among the several sects of religion, into what he calls "the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy."[2]

David Hume and the Aberdeen Theologians

About the same time that Four Dissertations was published, Hume began to receive tributes from abroad, especially from France. He regarded the critical and cultured French as the acknowledged leaders in the world of literary achievements. Consequently, when they began to praise his writings, Hume's animosity towards the obtuse British grew stronger. Churchmen like William Warburton and the bigoted and harsh Presbyterian George Anderson caused him to despair of ever gaining a hearing in Britain. There are indications that he even contemplated leaving his native land and settling in Paris.[3] But in the

[1] G. G., IV, 363. [2] G. G., IV, 363.

[3] See Dempster, op. cit., p. 22.

midst of bigotry and prejudice, Hume occasionally met individuals with whom he formed friendships. During his London visits in 1758-59 and 1761, he made many new friends. One group consisted of the churchmen who had answered his writings with courtesy and respect. At Hume's desire, the learned clerics--William Adams, John Douglas, and Richard Price--were invited to a dinner at Thomas Cadells' house. It is recorded that they "were all delighted with David,"[1] who long remained on good terms with them, exchanging visits and letters.[2]

In 1758 the Philosophical Society was founded at Aberdeen and although David Hume was never a member, he had a major part in its functioning. Thomas Reid explains how this was true:

> Your Friendly adversaries Drs Campbell & Gerard as well as Dr Gregory return their compliments to you respectfully. A little Philosophical Society here of which all the three are members, is much indebted to you for its entertainment. Your company would, although we are all good Christians, be more acceptable than that of Saint Athanasius. And since we cannot have you upon the bench you are brought oftener than any other man to the bar, accused and defended with great zeal but without bitterness. If you write no more in morals politicks or metaphysicks, I am affraid we shall be at a loss for subjects.[3]

George Campbell examined Hume's view of miracles in a sermon which he preached before the Synod of Aberdeen in 1760. When the ministers of the group desired him to publish it,

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[1]Samuel Rogers, Reminiscences and Table Talk of Samuel Rogers, ed. G. H. Powell (London: 1903), p. 67.

[2]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 393. See Letters, I, 333.

[3]Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 273.

Campbell put it in the form of an essay entitled a Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq; in an Essay on Miracles. Before sending the work to the press, he gave a copy to Hugh Blair with a request that he look it over and then try to get Hume's comments and criticisms. Blair communicated to Campbell the observations of Hume on the tone and matter of the essay. Hume wrote:

> I have perused the ingenious performance, which you was so obliging as to put into my hands, with all the attention possible; tho not perhaps with all the seriousness and gravity which you have so frequently recommended to me. But the fault lies not in the piece, which is certainly very acute; but in the subject. I know you will say, it lies in neither, but in myself alone. If that be so, I am sorry to say that I believe it is incurable.
>
> I could wish that your friend had not chosen to appear as a controversial writer, but had endeavoured to establish his principles in general, without any reference to a particular book or person; tho I own he does me a great deal of honour, in thinking that any thing I have wrote deserves his attention. For besides many inconveniences, which attend that kind of writing, I see it is almost impossible to preserve decency and good manners in it. This author, for instance, says sometimes obliging things of me much beyond what I can presume to deserve; and I thence conclude that in general he did not mean to insult me: yet I meet with some other passages more worthy of Warburton and his followers than of so ingenious an author.
>
> . . . Your friend . . . is certainly a very ingenious man, tho a little too zealous for a philosopher. . . .[1]

Hume then criticized some passages in Campbell's work. These criticisms indicate a few of Hume's own ideas on the subject of religion:

> There is no contradiction in saying, that all the testimony which ever was really given for a miracle, or ever will be given, is a subject of derision; and yet forming a fiction or supposition of a testimony for a

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[1] Letters, I, 349-351.

> particular miracle, which might not only merit attention, but amount to a full proof of it . . . .
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> . . . I find no difficulty to explain my meaning, and yet shall not probably do it in any future edition. The proof against a miracle, as it is founded on invariable experience, is of that species or kind of proof, which is full and certain when taken alone, because it implies no doubt, as is the case with all probabilities; but there are degrees of this species, and when a weaker proof is opposed to a stronger, it is overcome. . . .
>
> Does a man of sense run after every silly tale of witches or hobgoblins or fairies, and canvass particularly the evidence? I never knew any one, that examined and deliberated about nonsense who did not believe it before the end of his inquiries.
>
> . . . Miracle-working was a Popish trick, and discarded with the other parts of that religion. Men must have new and opposite ways of establishing new and opposite follies. . . . I never read of a miracle in my life, that was not meant to establish some new point of religion. . . .
>
> If a miracle proves a doctrine to be revealed from God, and consequently true, a miracle can never be wrought for a contrary doctrine. The facts are therefore as incompatible as the doctrines.[1]

These comments are followed by a paragraph in which Hume defends his position against the charge of infidelity:

> I could wish your friend had not denominated me an infidel writer, on account of ten or twelve pages which seem to him to have that tendency: while I have wrote so many volumes on history, literature, politics, trade, morals, which in that particular at least are entirely inoffensive. Is a man to be called a drunkard, because he has been seen fuddled once in his lifetime?[2]

The force of Hume's argument is evident--miracles can in no way be used to support religious beliefs. Yet, individuals do manifest belief in the realm of religion. It became Hume's problem to determine the origin and validity of such beliefs. He was convinced that religion could not be substantiated by reason, but to his mind this did not involve the acceptance of an atheistic position. He considered himself an infidel only in the sense that he could not accept the prevailing tendency

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[1] Letters, I, 349-351. [2] Letters, I, 351.

in the religious circles of his day to build a revelational theology on a rationalistic foundation. Neither could he accept a sentimentalistic type of religion which entirely discarded reason. It seems Hume was pointing the way to a religion grounded in human belief but worked out and analyzed by the reasoning capacity of the human mind.

After Campbell's Dissertation on Miracles appeared in 1762, Hume wrote a friendly letter to him:

> It has so seldom happened that controversies in philosophy, much more in theology, have been carried on without producing a personal quarrel between the parties, that I must regard my present situation as somewhat extraordinary, who have reason to give you thanks for the civil and obliging manner in which you have conducted the dispute against me, on so interesting a subject as that of miracles. Any little symptoms of vehemence, of which I formerly used the freedom to complain, when you favoured me with a sight of the manuscript, are either removed or explained away, or atoned for by civilities, which are far beyond what I have any title to pretend to. It will be natural for you to imagine, that I will fall upon some shift to evade the force of your arguments, and to retain my former opinion in the point controverted between us; but it is impossible for me not to see the ingenuity of your performance, and the great learning which you have displayed against me.
>
> I consider myself as very much honoured in being thoughtworthy of an answer by a person of so much merit.[1]

Hume then proceeds to explain why he will not answer Campbell's objection even though he has a strong inclination to defend himself: "I had fixed a resolution, in the beginning of my life, always to leave the public to judge between my adversaries and me, without making any reply."[2] Campbell responded in amicable terms and declared that he was forced "to love and Honour" Hume as a man because of the "goodness and candour,"[3]

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[1] Letters, I, 360. [2] Letters, I, 361.

[3] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 293-294.

which appeared in every line of Hume's letter.

It is unfortunate for us today that Hume made this resolution not to argue with his critics. If he had chosen to answer the objections made against his system we can be reasonably sure that his ideas would not have been so greatly misunderstood and misrepresented by succeeding generations. Possibly his enemies would have been less egotistical in their approach and perhaps Hume himself would have re-evaluated his system and clarified some of the concepts which were the cause of so much antagonism against him. As we have seen, he was generally regarded as a sceptic and an atheist--an enemy of religion. It is regrettable that Hume, who was well aware of this attitude, did not meet his critics and endeavor to elucidate his position in religion.

Very similar to the courteous polemic between Hume and Campbell was the manner in which Thomas Reid endeavored to refute Hume's philosophical thought. Besides debating Hume's opinions in the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, Reid composed an Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, in which he combated the theories contained in the Treatise of Human Nature.[1] Like Campbell beforehim, Reid, through his friend Hugh Blair, submitted the manuscript to Hume for comments. "Till that time the good-natured sceptic knew nothing of his opponent, and he received the parcel with natural reluctance, expecting a humdrum refutation, by a scandalised minister of the Gospel, of a treatise which he had himself discarded, and

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[1] Supra, pp. 3-6.

wished to be forgotten."[1] For the moment Hume was irritated and told Blair sharply, "I wish that the Parsons would confine themselves to their old occupation of worrying one another, and leave Philosophers to argue with temper, moderation, and good manners."[2] Hume later relented when he was assured that Reid was a calm, acute philosopher who did not forget charity in zeal for the faith.

After reading the manuscript of the Inquiry, Hume wrote directly to Reid:

> By Dr Blair's means I have been favoured with the perusal of your performance, which I have read with great pleasure and attention. It is certainly very rare that a piece so deeply philosophical is wrote with so much spirit, and affords so much entertainment to the reader. . . . I must do you the justice to own, that when I enter into your ideas, no man appears to express himself with greater perspicuity than you do; a talent which, above all others, is requisite in that species of literature which you have cultivated. . . . I shall only say, that if you have been able to clear up these abstruse and important subjects, instead of being mortified, I shall be so vain as to pretend to a share of the praise; and shall think that my errors, by having at least some coherence, had led you to make a more strict review of my principles, which were the common ones, and to perceive their futility.[3]

Hume corrects Reid on a matter of style and then closes with his compliments to his "friendly adversaries, Dr Campbell and Dr Gerard, and also to Dr Gregory."[4]

Reid replied to Hume's courteous letter:

> . . . I thought myself very happy in having the means of obtaining at second hand, through the friendship of Dr

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[1] Graham, Men of Letters, p. 251.

[2] Quoted in Dugald Stewart, Biographical Memoirs of Smith, Robertson, and Reid (Edinburgh, 1811), p. 417.

[3] Letters, I, 375-376. [4] Letters, I, 376.

> Blair, your opinion of my performance; and you have been pleased to communicate it directly, in so polite & friendly a manner as merits great acknowledgements on my part.
>
> Your keeping a watchful Eye, over my Style with a view to be of use to me, is an Instance of Candor and Generosity to an Antagonist, which would affect me very sensibly although I had no personal concern in it. And I shall always be proud to follow so amiable an Example.
>
> In attempting to throw some new light upon these abstruse Subjects, I wish to preserve the due mean betwixt Confidence and Despair. But whether I have any success in this Attempt or not, I shall always avow my self your Disciple in Metaphysicks. I have learned more from your writings in this kind than from all others put together. Your System appears to me not only coherent in all its parts, but likeways justly deduced from principles commonly received among Philosophers: Principles, which I never thought of calling in Question, untill the conclusions you draw from them in the treatise of human Nature made me suspect them. If these principles are Solid your System must stand; and whether they are or not, can better be judged after you have brought to light the whole System that grows out of them, than when the greater part of it was wrapped up in clouds and darkness. I agree with you therefore that if this System shall ever be demolished, you have a just claim to a great share of the Praise, both because you have made it a distinct and determinate mark to be aimed at, and have furnished proper artillery for that purpose.[1]

It is apparent that Reid missed the whole point of Hume's sceptical arguments. In the Inquiry into the Human Mind Reid regarded Hume's only contribution to philosophy to lie in the reducing to absurdity of the whole modern system. The publication of the Inquiry in 1764 inaugurated the radical misunderstanding of Hume which dominated the philosophical world for well over a century. Mossner sees "pervasive irony" in Hume's letter: "Reid had so thoroughly misconceived him that Hume contented himself with the correction of a Scotticism!"

> Thomas Reid was the sole philosopher worthy of the name who dealt at any length with the Treatise of Human Nature during the lifetime of its author, and, prior to Kant, he remained the most thorough. Little wonder that

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[1] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 298-299.

> Hume was ready to renounce publicly that Treatise which, after a quarter of a century, could still engender in its readers so little understanding of its basic ideas![1]

Diplomatic Service in France

With the publication, early in 1762, of the History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII Hume's work as a philosopher and man of letters virtually ceased. Some of his close associates urged him to add a volume or two on the history of Great Britain from the Revolution of 1688 to the accession of George I or even of George II, but he never succeeded in accomplishing more than the collection of a few notes. Hume's French friends tried to get him to write an ecclesiastical history probably because they desired to see "the application of his powers of irony to popes and cardinals, presbyters and bishops, and the nice points of theological disputes."[2] Nothing ever came of these projects, however, and Hume laid aside his pen of literary composition for a pen of diplomatic service.

During the period from October 1763 until November 1765 David Hume served as Embassy Secretary to Lord Hertford in Paris. Hertford was regarded as a pious, orthodox churchman, and Hume informs a friend that having been chosen by such an individual, he is "now a Person clean & white as the driven Snow."[3] In another letter, written after he had arrived in

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[1] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 299; 300.

[2] Greig, op. cit., p. 267. [Cf. Mossner, The Life of David Hume, pp. 484-485.]

[3] Letters, I, 393.

France, Hume exclaims: "I am . . . in the high road to dignities. You must know, that Lord Hertford has so high a character for piety, that his taking me by the hand is a kind of regeneration to me, and all past offences are now wiped off."[1]

Hume was not long in Paris before he became acquainted with a number of important personages. "I naturally sought and obtained Connexions with the learned," he remarked and later informed Hugh Blair:

> The Men of Letters here are really very agreeable; all of them Men of the World, living in entire or almost entire Harmony among themselves, and quite irreproachable in their Morals. It woud give you & Jardine & Robertson great Satisfaction to find that there is not a single Deist among them. Those whose Persons & Conversation I like best are D'Alembert, Buffon, Marmontel, Diderot, Duclos, Helvétius; and old President Henaut. . . .[2]

The reference to Deism is plainly ironical. Diderot records how Hume learned the religious opinion of the group, meeting in Baron d'Holbach's house:

> . . . La première fois que M. Hume se trouva à la table du baron, il étoit assis à côté de lui. Je ne scais à quel propos le philosophe anglois s'auisa de dire au baron qu'il ne croyait pas aux athées, qu'il ne'en avoit jamais vu. Le baron lui dit: «Comptez combien nous sommes ici.» Nous étions dix-huit. Le baron ajouta: «Il n'est pas malheureux de pouvoir vous en montrer quinze du premier coup: les trois autres ne scavent qu'en penser.»[3]

In the philosophical sessions at Holbach's some of the best minds in Paris came together to discuss topics in philosophy, religion, and politics. "Religion, its superstitions and its evil consequences to society, provided a constant and

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[1] Letters, I, 422-423. [2] Letters, I, 419.

[3] Denis Diderot, Lettres à Sophie Volland, ed. André Babelon (Paris, 1938), II, 77.

fertile topic of conversation."[1] One would imagine that David Hume found entire satisfaction in these assemblies; however, there is reason to believe that he was not perfectly satisfied. He learned to respect many of these French thinkers but could not go the length of their scepticism, which outstretched his doubts and ended in materialism and atheism. "The philosophes simply could not understand Hume's sceptical or agnostic position and were inclined to think that he had not entirely thrown off the shackles of bigotry."[2] In 1763 Gibbon visited Paris and recorded that the philosophes "laughed at the scepticism of Hume, preached the tenets of atheism with the bigotry of dogmatists, and damned all believers with ridicule and contempt."[3] Writing from Paris in 1764, Sir James Macdonald informed a friend in England "that poor Hume, who on your side of the water was thought to have too little religion is here thought to have too much."[4] Hume himself confirms this statement in a letter written many years later: "Both Lord Marischal and Helvétius . . . used to laugh at me for my narrow way of thinking in these particulars."[5] They were not able to change his deliberate judgment expressed in the Dialogues: ". . . nothing can afford a stronger presumption, that any set of principles are true, and ought to

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 483. [2]Ibid., p. 485.

[3]Edward Gibbon, Memoirs, ed. O. F. Emerson (Boston, 1898), p. 135.

[4]Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 485.

[5]Letters, II, 274.

be embraced, than to observe, that they tend to the confirmation of true religion, and serve to confound the cavils of atheists, libertines, and freethinkers of all denominations."[1]

David Hume protested against the infidelity of Paris.[2] He denounced dogmatism whether he found it expressed in theism or atheism. "Over the ubiquitous dogmatism on the issue of religion, the philosopher of human nature may well have been inclined to despondency."[3] He doubtlessly was dismayed when the French philosophers advocated their variety of empiricism which was mingled with metaphysical necessitarianism. "The dogmatism, he found, was not confined to atheism, but extended into metaphysics, economics, and related social subjects."[4] The a priori character of French atheism and materialism showed complete indifference to his philosophy of mitigated scepticism. "The old Aristotelian dogmatism of the schools was but replaced in France by a new dogmatism of inevitable progress."[5] Intellectual depression must have overwhelmed Hume as a result of his experience with the French intelligentsia.

Hume differed greatly with the French atheists on the status of religion in human affairs. In the concluding chapter of the Life and Correspondence of David Hume, John Hill Burton

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[1] D, 140.

[2] Samuel Romilly, Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, Written by Himself; with a Selection from his Correspondence, ed. by his Sons (London: John Murray, 1840), I, 179.

[3] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 486.

[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., p. 487.

makes some pertinent remarks on Hume's social character and on his attitude towards religion. Burton states:

> . . . . the tone of his thoughts sometimes rose to enthusiasm. Thus the son of his valued friend Ferguson, remembers his father saying, that, one clear and beautiful night, when they were walking home together, Hume suddenly stopped, looked up to the starry sky, and said, more after the manner of "Hervey's Meditations" than the "Treatise of Human Nature," "Oh, Adam, can any one contemplate the wonders of that firmament, and not believe that there is a God!"[1]

Burton continues:

> Those who know him solely by his philosophical reputation, will perhaps believe him to have been Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens. But this does not seem to have been the case, at least in his outward conduct.[2]

That Hume retained an interest in church attendance is illustrated by correspondence with Gilbert Elliot concerning his sons, whom Hume had more or less supervised while they were being educated in France. In the course of one letter Hume mentions that he had not found "your young Gentlemen in Church last Sunday."[3] In earlier communications he had shown his concern for the Elliot boys' religious training and indicated to their father that they would "need never go to Mass unless they please, and nobody shall ever talk to them about Religion" [in an endeavor to convert them to Catholicism].[4] And again: "They are never to hear Mass, but to attend at the Ambassador's Chapel every Sunday."[5] On another occasion Hume made an allusion, indicative that he himself had been a fairly

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[1] Burton, op. cit., II, 451.

[2] Ibid., II, 452-453.

[3] Letters, I, 509.

[4] Letters, I, 473.

[5] Letters, I, 482.

regular attendant at the ambassador's chapel.[1] Burton declares:

> [Hume] is said to have been fond of Dr. Robertson's preaching and not averse to that of his colleague and opponent, John Erskine. A lady, distinguished in literature, remembers that in a conversation with a respectable tradesman's wife, who had been a servant to Hume, she said that her master one day asked her very seriously, why she was never seen in church, where he had provided seats for all his household. . . . The woman's defence was, that she belonged to a dissenting congregation; and it was admitted to be quite satisfactory.[2]

It was as the result of attendance at a religious service that David Hume had the famous exchange with the Reverend Laurence Sterne in Paris in May 1764. Sterne had been asked to deliver a sermon before an audience in the tiny chapel of Lord Hertford's Embassy. Hume was among those present, and that evening he entered into a friendly tussle with the preacher concerning miracles, a subject which had been given a prominent place in the sermon. Sterne records that the "little pleasant sparring at Lord Hertford's table" had "nothing in it that did not bear the marks of good-will and urbanity on both sides. . . . David was disposed to make a little merry with the Parson; and, in return, the Parson was equally disposed to make a little mirth with the Infidel; we laughed at one another, and the company laughed with us both."[3]

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[1] "I never see Mr Wilkes here but at Chapel, where he is a most regular, & devout, and edifying, and pious Attendant. I take him to be entirely regenerate." [Letters, I, 444.]

[2] Burton, op. cit., II, 453.

[3] Lawrence Sterne, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 219. [Cf. Wilbur L. Cross, Life and Times of Laurence Sterne (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), II, 34.]

Another glimpse into Hume's character is given by the sons of Baron Mure. They were taken to see St. Paul's Cathedral and were informed that the daily service was not attended and that even on Sundays the congregation was small. Thinking this situation presented an excellent opportunity to gain the favor of the "Great Infidel," the boys remarked "how foolish it was to lay out a million . . . on a thing so useless." Hume, however, gave them an instant denunciation:

> Never give an opinion on subjects which you are too young to judge. St. Paul's as a monument of the religious feeling and sentiment of the country, does it honour, and will endure. We have wasted millions on a single campaign in Flanders, and without any good resulting from it.[1]

These incidents lead to the suggestion that at least in outward conduct David Hume gave assent to the importance of the church in the life of an individual. Yet, he was not willing to be a hypocrite in these matters and therefore made no pretense of being a whole-hearted supporter of any religious organization. For instance, on one occasion, Hume gave his candid opinion to a young man who, though in holy orders, had a tendency to scepticism and sought the philosopher's advice. A letter from James Edmonstoune to Hume provides some details concerning the young clergyman:

> . . . I write you at present to consult you about an Acquaintance of your Mr Vivian who is here with Lord Abingdon and who thinks of returning to England May next. You'll be so good as to determine for him what Character he is to assume on his Arrival, whether that of a Clergyman or a Layman. I suppose you know he is in Orders, but he is very very low Church, to speak plain Language, I believe him to be [a] Sort of Disciple of your own and tho he does not carry Matters quite so far as you yet you have

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[1] Caldwell Papers, I, 38.

given him Notions not very consistent with his Priestly Character so that you see you are somewhat bound to give him your best advice. . . . Youll determine whether a Man of Probity can accept of a Living&Bishoprick that does not believe all the 39 Articles; for you only can fix him, he has been hitherto irresolute. If [I am not] mistaken he seems rather inclined not to be a Clergyman but you know better than I do how difficult it is to get any tolerable civil Employment. I mean any patent place. Write as soon as you can conveniently and if you should determine for his being a Clergyman throw in something consolatory on his being oblig'd to renounce white Stockings the rest of his Life. . . .[1]

Hume's answer is indeed straightforward and indicates his personal feelings on the subject of religious orders:

What! do you know that Lord Bute is again all-powerful, or rather that he was always so, but is now acknowledged for such by all the world. Let this be a new motive for Mr Vivian to adhere to the ecclesiastical profession, in which he may have so good a patron; for civil employment, for men of letters can scarcely be found: all is occupied by men of business, or by parliamentary interest.

It is putting too great a respect on the vulgar, and on their superstitions, to pique one's self on sincerity with regard to them. Did ever one make it a point of honour to speak truth to children or madmen? If the thing were worthy being treated gravely, I should tell him, that the Pythian oracle, with the approbation of Xenophon, advised every one to worship the gods νομω πολεως. I wish it were still in my power to be a hypocrite in this particular. The common duties of society usually require it; and the ecclesiastical profession only adds a little more to an innocent dissimulation, or rather simulation, without which it is impossible to pass through the world. Am I a liar, because I order my servant to say, I am not at home, when I do not desire to see company?[2]

Retirement in Edinburgh

David Hume served as Under-Secretary of State, Northern Department, at London in 1767 and 1768. It is interesting to note that one of his various duties was the composition of the King's annual letter to the General Assembly of the

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[1] Letters, II, 353-354. [2] Letters, I, 439-440.

Church of Scotland--that venerable body which, some years before, had considered excommunicating him because of "impious and infidel principles" expressed in his books.[1] Assisting in the administration of ecclesiastical patronage in Scotland, Hume now received petitions for advancement from the presbyters of the Church. He used his influence with General Conway, the Secretary of State, "to steer Scottish church patronage into the proper channels, that is to say, to the Moderate Party."[2] In the King's letter addressed to the General Assembly in May 1767, Hume gave recognition to the merits of the Moderate leaders:

> You may be assured that the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, as by law established, will always meet with Our support to the full enjoyment of their rights and privileges; and We are convinced, that the same wise conduct, which has so often manifested itself in your former meetings, will be exerted on the present occasion, and that cordiality, unanimity, and brotherly love will attend all your proceedings, and be the means of securing a happy and satisfactory conclusion of this present meeting of the General Assembly.[3]

Another indication of Hume's respect for and aid to the Moderates is found in his treatment of the Reverend Dr. Robert Henry, an historian who had turned to him for advice and assistance. It was through Hume's repeated efforts that Strahan and Cadell brought out Henry's first volume of the History of Great Britain in 1771.[4] In a review of the book Hume pays sincere tribute to his clerical associates by extending

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[1] See supra, pp. 272-284.

[2] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 540.

[3] Quoted in Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 540.

[4] Ibid., p. 583.

a kindly patronage to his new friend, Robert Henry and a well-meant acknowledgment to two old friends, William Robertson and Hugh Blair. It concludes with the following sentences:

> The reader will scarcely find in our language, except in the works of the celebrated Dr. Robertson, any performance that unites together so perfectly the great points of entertainment and instruction. It is happy for the inhabitants of this metropolis, which has naturally a great influence on the country, that the same persons who can make such a figure in profane learning, are intrusted with the guidance of the people in their spiritual concerns, which are of such superior, and indeed of unspeakable importance. These illustrious examples, if any thing, must make the infidel abashed of his vain cavils, and put a stop to that torrent of vice, profaneness, and immorality, by which the age is so unhappily distinguished.
>
> This city can justly boast of other signal characters of the same kind, whom learning and piety, taste and devotion, philosophy and faith, joined to the severest morals and most irreproachable conduct, concur to embellish. One in particular, with the same hand by which he turns over the sublime pages of Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero, is not ashamed to open with reverence the sacred volumes; and with the same voice by which, from the pulpit, he strikes vice with consternation, he deigns to dictate to his pupils the most useful lessons of Rhetoric, poetry, and polite literature.[1]

James Beattie is chiefly responsible for disturbing the tranquillity of Hume's years of retirement in Edinburgh. Beattie's pious friend Dr. John Gregory, Professor of Physics, wrote from Edinburgh in 1766 informing him that "materialism and atheism are the present fashion." In Gregory's alarming reports of the encroachments of infidelity, Beattie is told that "absolute dogmatic atheism is the present tone" and that "a man who expresses belief in a future state of existence is

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[1] Quoted in Burton, op. cit., II, 470. For a detailed discussion of the circumstances surrounding the episode of Hume's suppressed review, see E. C. Mossner, "Hume as Literary Patron: A Suppressed Review of Robert Henry's History of Great Britain, 1773" in Modern Philology, XXXIX (1942), 361-382.

regarded as a fool or a hypocrite."[1] All this seems to be attributed to the "licentious teaching" of David Hume. Considering himself the best man to chasten offenders, Beattie felt it his duty to defend orthodoxy against the malignant scepticism of Hume, whose theories were a frequent subject of debate at the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen. Diligently, Beattie labored on the Essay on the Origin and Immutability of Truth, which was expressly written to combat the position of Hume and was expected to silence scoffers and convince doubters. "The Professor was no philosopher; he knew nothing of his subject till he began to teach it, and not much even then; he disliked metaphysics, which he never could understand, and yet he essayed the task."[2]

Unlike Hume's other "friendly Adversaries" at Aberdeen, who treated the philosopher with the respect due a serious thinker, Beattie attempted to arouse the emotional prejudice of his readers. By the use of abusive language, Beattie hit the right tone for popular success, and the Essay was received with great enthusiasm, especially in England. "Seeing nothing of the constructive side of Hume's philosophy of human nature and mistaking him for a complete sceptic, anxious only to subvert Christianity, the age would have rejoiced to see him demolished by any means."[3] Mossner declares

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[1]Margaret Forbes, Beattie and His Friends, (London, 1904), p. 45.

[2]Graham, Men of Letters, p. 263.

[3]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 581.

that "it was not until 1783 that his [Beattie's] flimsy pretensions to philosophy were fully exposed. Kant's irony may be taken as the final word on James Beattie as a poet-turned-philosopher."[1]

It is quite understandable that David Hume was genuinely angry. His reported exclamation about the Essay on Truth -- "Truth! there is no truth in it; it is a horrible large lie in octavo"[2] -- caused Beattie to exult:

> Mr. Hume's censure I am so far from being ashamed of, that I think it does me honour. It is, next to his conversion (which I have no reason to look for) the most desirable thing I have to expect from that quarter. I have heard from very good authority, that he speaks of me and my book with very great bitterness (I own, I thought he would rather have affected to treat both with contempt): and that he says, I have not used him like a gentleman. He is quite right to set the matter upon that footing.[3]

Early in his literary career Hume had determined never to reply in print to any criticisms of his works. In the main he maintained this long-standing resolution and did not answer his opponents directly. In many respects this was not a good practice, when made so absolute. Besides leaving himself open to charges of arrogance and self-sufficiency, the measure deprived him of the chance to engage in

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[1] Ibid. "I should have thought that Hume had as good a claim to sound sense as Beattie, and on top of this to something that Beattie certainly did not possess, namely a critical reason, which keeps common sense within limits, so that it does not soar into speculation and lose itself, or if speculations alone are at issue, does not try to decide anything, not knowing how to justify itself concerning its own principles; for only thus will it remain sound sense." [Kant, op. cit., pp. 8-9.]

[2] Gentleman's Magazine, XLVII (1777), 159n.

[3] William Forbes, op. cit., p. 171.

free and keen discussions with his critics. An answer to such men as Thomas Reid would likely have done Hume himself some good and might even have caused Reid to re-think much of his own system. As it was, the common-sense philosopher considered his criticisms of Hume as final, and the errors of this interpretation of Hume's thought were perpetuated in Reid's followers. Reid's supposedly successful refutation of Hume led Beattie to attempt further criticism on the same basis. Hume's resentment of the publication of the Essay on Truth and of its subsequent popularity took the form of the famous "Advertisement" to a final edition of his philosophical works:

> Most of the principles, and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work of three volumes, called A Treatise of Human Nature: A work which the author had projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression are, he hopes corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the Author's Philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work, which the Author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantage, which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: A practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigotted zeal thinks itself authorized to employ. Henceforth, the Author desires, that the following pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles.[1]

Hume evidently considered it futile to attempt to discuss Beattie's misconceptions of the truth. Writing to Strahan, Hume comments: ". . . this Advertisement . . . is a

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[1]G. G., III, 37-38.

compleat Answer to Dr Reid and to that bigotted silly Fellow, Beattie."[1] Actually, it was no answer at all but rather the petulant and weary confession of a man tired of controversy. Hume despaired of ever being understood.

> It can only be that the long and unhappy career of the youthful Treatise from 1739 to 1775, reaching the climax in the latest spate of abuse from Beattie, finally determined Hume to make a public repudiation. Happily, few philosophers have taken the "Advertisement" seriously; and the Treatise of Human Nature, so needlessly and so unsuccessfully maligned by its own author, is generally and properly regarded as his masterpiece.[2]

In point of fact, Hume never really disavowed the philosophy of the Treatise. Even in these years of extreme disappointment and bitterness, he was planning to have the Dialogues issued contemporaneously with the final edition of his works. He continued to revise them and intended that they should be a complete response to the attacks of his opponents. In Hume's estimation, the Dialogues were the careful and artistic expression of the basic principles of his thought applied in the realm of religion. He was anxious for the fate of this work until the end, and only in the last year of his life was it known by his close friends and relatives that special provisions for the publication of the Dialogues had been made in his will.

As a man who held "unorthodox" views on religion and immortality, Hume no doubt realized that the manner of his death would be of public interest. He determined to die philosophically, true to the principles expressed in his books.

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[1] Letters, II, 301.

[2] Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 582.

In "My Own Life" he declares:

> I now reckon upon a speedy Dissolution. I have suffered very little pain from my Disorder; and what is more strange, have, notwithstanding the great Decline of my Person, never suffered a Moments Abatement of my Spirits: Insomuch, that were I to name the Period of my Life which I shoud most choose to pass over again I might be tempted to point to this later Period. I possess the same Ardor as ever in Study, and the same Gaiety in Company. I consider besides, that a Man of sixty five, by dying, cuts off only a few Years of Infirmities: And though I see many Symptoms of my literary Reputation's breaking out at last with additional Lustre, I know, that I had but few Years to enjoy it. It is difficult to be more detached from Life than I am at present.[1]

Hume's opinions remained imperturbable in the face of the questioning of James Boswell, who was determined to find out whether the philosopher--having death before his eyes--could still solemnly declare his disbelief in immortality.[2] Hume persisted in his agnosticism and gave reasons for his position much the same as those expressed in the suppressed essay on immortality. He asserted that the thought of complete annihilation gave him no more uneasiness than the thought that he had once not existed. The interview gives the impression that Hume may have been amusing himself at Boswell's expense. But there is no reason to believe that he was not expressing his personal beliefs on the subject of immortality. At any rate, his statements are in line with his often expressed conviction that it is impossible to base religious belief on reason. As for his own intimate faith Hume obviously lacked the trust and devotion characteristic of a truly religious individual.

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[1] Letters, I, 7.

[2] See Boswell, Private Papers, XII, 225-232.

Concluding Comments

When Hume saw the end of life approaching, he made certain by special provisions in his will that the Dialogues would be published as the expression of his ideas on religion. In a sense, then, the work is an attempt to placate his age by means of an explication of his true religious position. By the year 1754 Hume had finished the historical treatment of religion in the "Natural History of Religion" but he spent several more years on the philosophical aspects of the subject. The Dialogues were his last philosophical endeavor, and from various letters between Hume and his friends as well as from the fact that he took the utmost pains for its publication, we know that this work was highly esteemed by its author.

The Dialogues were carefully prepared and written and contain some of Hume's most explicit statements on religion. The work has become a philosophical classic, widely discussed and variously interpreted. It would not be possible within the confines of this thesis to analyze the discussion of the Dialogues and such a study is unnecessary here. What we intend to do is to note the outstanding characteristics of the argument as they have a bearing on Hume's attitude towards religion.

It is difficult to make a proper estimate of this contribution of Hume to the philosophy of theology. He seems to purposely veil his true opinions by introducing three interlocutors--Demea, Cleanthes and Philo--and by putting something of his own beliefs into the mouth of each.[1] Possibly he intended

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[1] See Mossner's discussion on the identity of these three characters. ["The Enigma of Hume."]

to show by the general nature of the discussion how difficult it is to argue about religion on a rational basis. Or perhaps he allowed his own opinions to remain in doubt because this was actually where he found himself in the religious sphere, i.e., in the position of an agnostic. At any rate, the teaching of the Dialogues is predominately negative and leaves only a few minor religious arguments by which the believer may support his faith.[1] The reason for this negativism is that Hume uses scepticism to show the futility of trying to prove the validity of religious beliefs by rationalism. He felt that an important service was to be rendered to the cause of religion by unreserved critical handling of the difficulties which beset man's attempts to apply the theistic conception in the midst of finite relations.

The Dialogues are a plain, painstaking attempt to discover what reasoned foundation, if any, could be allowed for religion. In other words, the chief question is--"Can there be a natural theology?" Hume was interested in determining whether our natural faculties, employing the data of experience, are or are not capable of establishing the truth of theism. He discussed God and the relation of God to the natural world. In this respect he dealt with natural theology in a restricted and literal sense. His study was limited in

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[1] In a careful study of the original manuscripts and of the revisions and additions which Hume made, Kemp Smith concludes that "the teaching of the Dialogues is much more sheerly negative than has generally been held." This statement is corroborated by evidence from Hume's letters and the "Natural History of Religion." See Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues.

that man was not brought into the picture and thus such problems as freedom and immortality were ignored. Hume was still viewing religion from the standpoint of a purely external observer.

The professed subject of debate in the Dialogues is the nature of God, all three speakers having agreed to take the being of God as certain.[1] The discussion centers on a statement and criticism of the teleological argument, theism's most cogent proof for the intelligence of the ultimate cause of the universe. The question arises as to whether the argument from design, as an argument from analogy, can allow of being formulated in a tenable manner. Hume had placed limitations upon the argument in Section XI of the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding and in the "Natural History of Religion." It is qualified even further in the Dialogues as he comes to the agnostic conclusion that God's nature, attributes and plan of providence in the world are obscure, doubtful and uncertain. Thus, although Hume all along allows for some validity of the argument, we now see that it does not give us much knowledge about the God who exists. The argument from design may reach a conception of God that is lofty, yet it can never attain to the conception of an Infinite. The finite world, with all its defects and abounding misery in the midst of its order and adaptation, can never lead us to an inference of an infinite, perfect, all-powerful, all-wise and benevolent deity.

Hume contends that although the argument from design

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[1]D, 128; 141.

purports to be an argument from experience, it is unable to point to any circumstance which would be incompatible with quite different hypotheses about the way things come into being. He indicates the inadequacy of the teleological proof when taken by itself and in isolation from the demands of the moral nature. The argument cannot show that anything whatsoever would be different were the world not designed. Herein lies the proof of its emptiness. The difficulty with which we are faced in this essentially negative conclusion represents for Hume the crux of the theological situation. The argument from design is the "religious hypothesis" par excellence; yet it is not defensible on the basis of reason or experience.

In accordance with his general distrust of rationalism, Hume again repudiates Deism with its insistence upon natural religion. He claims such a system is not capable of attaining, by reason, that certainty which its supporters believed. The ultimate cause of the universe--theology's one great postulate--lies beyond the sphere of reason. Thus, the last support of the "religious hypothesis"--the argument from design-- is wrested from the hands of the Deists. Hume contends that a rationalistic study of nature cannot prove the dogmas of religion--reason is not equal to the task of proof. Since there is no corroborative evidence from nature (sensative realm) for religious entities (transcendent realm), the natural theology of Deism is bankrupt. One single effect or artifact (the universe) makes it virtually impossible to argue by analogy to one cause or one artificer. It is precarious to argue in such

cases since the solar system is a rare, unique object and we do not have a range of possible worlds, nor the possibility of bringing about another world.

The Dialogues confirm Hume's basic principles expressed in his other works. He at no time abandoned his original plan (expressed in the Treatise) of developing a complete system of the sciences based on the science of human nature. In the Dialogues he expounds and develops his scepticism and logic (the main principles of which had been firmly established in the Treatise) in opposition to what he considers false theology. Mossner describes the book in the following terms:

> It shows that Hume rejects all attempts to base religion upon metaphysics. It shows further that a religion based upon matters of fact and scientific method still finds it difficult to rise beyond human nature and the world of nature into the realm of the supernatural.[1]

Rationalism in religion is destroyed by Hume's negative speculation but a possibility remains for establishing a religion based on natural belief. This is analogous to his contention that it is instinct or natural belief which determines our action in the moral sphere. Man is bound to think, or infer, a purposive Being as the meaning and cause of the universe. This natural judgment holds whatever be its defects in logic or method.

In the Dialogues Hume allows for and appears to have personally held a belief in the existence of an intellectual Deity, having some dim analogy to human intelligence. But he distinctly refuses to predicate anything more regarding it, or

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[1]Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 606.

of its relations to the universe, especially as to its moral character. This conclusion leaves the reader with a vague and shadowy type of theistic religion. Nevertheless, it is not atheism. For Hume it was seemingly just as impossible to rest in religious scepticism, as to remain in scepticism about the existence of an external world. According to him atheism is largely a term of abuse, and disputes between atheists and believers are largely verbal since a suspension of judgment is impossible. By our very nature we must believe and make judgments.

The Dialogues show that the questions which theism raises are outside the sphere of human reason. The position reached here is a logical development of the principles of the Treatise. The a priori proofs of theism are effectively criticized. The pure being reached by these proofs, if valid, is a mere abstraction of the intellect, a speculative dogma, remote from practice. Likewise, Hume acutely shows the limitations of the a posteriori proofs. The only intelligible defense of the religious hypothesis, he concludes, is its utility--its possible impact on morals.

The closing paragraphs of the Dialogues call us away from the speculations of pure theology to the practical application of divine truth in life. Through the mouth of Philo come Hume's last words on religion added to the Dialogues in the final revision of 1776:

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the

> cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs; and believe that the arguments, on which it is established, exceed the objections which lie against it? Some astonishment indeed will naturally arise from the greatness of the object: Some melancholy from its obscurity: Some contempt of human reason, that it can give no solution more satisfactory with regard to so extraordinary and magnificent a question. But believe me, CLEANTHES, the most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our Faith. A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any farther aid, and rejects this adventitious instructor. To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound believing Christian. . . .[1]

From the preceding study of the life and works of David Hume we arrive at the following conclusions regarding his attitude towards religion. There is no doubt that religion and the evidence for and against it, was one of the dominant interests of Hume's life. He was diligently occupied, indeed pre-occupied, with theological arguments. Experimental theism--its presuppositions, its relations to morality, and to the state, its hostility to bigotry and to superstition--comprised one of the major problems that was seldom quiescent in his mind.

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[1] D, 227-228.

His speculations led him from questioning the validity of theological doctrines into an evaluation of the whole problem of religion.

The principal aim of Hume's "experimental" philosophy was to justify natural as opposed to rationalistic belief, thus providing an adequate basis for the sciences, and more especially, for the more "human" among the sciences. Judged by rationalistic canons, no matter of fact could be established; scepticism wins out in the end. But there is a natural belief upon which we can build our knowledge. Hume suggested that beliefs that flow in upon us with the force of sensation are as good as sensation itself. It was this emphasis on belief which attracted the "Faith Philosophers" of Germany, and they used the positive doctrines of Hume's philosophy in the refutation of the "intellectual" position of Kant. Because of his insistence on the primacy of "feeling" in all spheres of human activity, Hume was naturally the philosopher to whom the faith school referred. Hamann and Herder attached great importance to his doctrine of natural belief and regarded him as an advocate of faith philosophy. In many respects this interpretation of Hume was nearer the truth than the common view that Hume was "for science and against religion."

Hume was overjoyed by his discovery concerning the role of natural belief in knowledge and as an exemplar of the Age of Enlightenment, he exulted on the title-page of the Treatise: "Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentiri, quae velis; & quae sentias, dicere licet." At this time he had not

explicitly expressed his views on religion. Subsequently, he came to realize that he had misjudged the felicity of the age--the vaunted liberty of the press was not fully extended to religious speculation. Hume's life was a constant struggle against the inertia of ideas and the forces of superstition and intolerance.

Hume wrote as a builder of the science of human nature and it was as such that he encouraged in men the hope of the successful extension of scientific progress to human nature itself. He hoped to find a reasoned, definitive and accurate answer to all problems--religious, moral, social, and political. Hume regarded his first task to be an emancipation of his fellowmen from error and delusion. Although he destroyed the old theology and metaphysics by his questioning concerning the ground of causal reasoning, he constructed a "new medium of truth," justifying a faith in the sciences he himself claimed to advance. His attitude towards religion parallels that towards science. Faith or belief, whether in science or theology, is not a matter of reason. It is an instinct or emotion or whatever one might call that realm which lies more or less outside our "rational" processes. Reason is limited in its application; rationalism and a rationalistic basis is denied for science as well as religion.

Hume was not a Christian. He regarded Christian beliefs as in the main a malign influence. Doubtlessly, he reasoned this way because Christianity was not presented to him as a religion of love, but as a religion of fear. Its ethics

was an ethics of fear. Hume reacted against the hell-fire Calvinism of the early Presbyterian Church in which he was brought up. He criticized the crude Calvinistic dogma for overlooking the importance of the ordinary virtues and for neglecting them in order to concentrate attention upon salvation. Calvinism in Hume's mind served as an example of false religion with consequences pernicious in society and utterly demoralizing in the individual. Yet he never denied the existence of God, nor did he directly impugn revelation. And although his final word on the subject of religion suggests doubt and uncertainty, he nonetheless allows for the possibility of substituting a true religion for the false. The concept of true religion found in Hume's writings is that according to which we assent to the existence of God, and for the rest give our energies to the practice of morality. Religion should limit itself to reinforcing moral sanctions. The more we adhere to this "true religion" the more we abhor both the vulgar superstitions that have caused so many miseries in human history and those divines who inculcate and preach them. Religion, zealously held, is very detrimental to the welfare of the individual as well as to the state.

The main interest of Hume's work on theology was not to combat religion or Christianity as such but rather to destroy that type of thinking which was based on fanatical dogmatism, superstitious sentimentalism or the rationalistic, demonstrative systems established by the Cartesians. He strongly opposed a "rigid inflexible orthodoxy" which was content to

accept its first principles without factual investigations, and from them to deduce a conclusion as demonstrably certain as the proposition that the sum of the three angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. "Hume attacks not theism, but superstition and idolatry; he questions not the existence of God but only the mistaken arguments for such existence, and the unworthy modes of conception in which they result."[1]

It was Hume's opinion that religion develops from the elements of human nature rather than out of an intricate process of reasoning on the part of man. We are not to appeal to reason in religious matters; religion must be based on natural belief. In this way, the difficulty which reason finds in establishing the nature of the Deity does not affect the foundation of religion in our human nature.

Throughout his life Hume remained consistently sceptical of all traditional forms of religion; he had no sympathy for popular religion. He was fundamentally the sceptic bringing to a close, at least so far as philosophy was concerned, the Age of Reason in Great Britain. Being in philosophy a sceptic, Hume was regarded as a sceptic in religion. "Hume the Atheist" was a common designation in his own day and persists even now. Accordingly he was resisted and condemned as an enemy of religion. This antagonism fretted his life and often seriously embittered Hume towards religion and clergymen. But he did not deprecate religious faith. His scepticism in religion applied to that theology which attempted to bring

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[1]Kemp Smith, Introduction to the Dialogues, p. 37.

reason into the religious sphere. Since the knowledge of God cannot come through the senses, religion must be exclusively a matter of belief.

The conception of true religion which Hume seems to have held was an assent to the existence of God and for the rest we are to give our energies to the practice of morality. Religion is for Hume, in the first place, a simple faith and, secondly, a rule of conduct in the present life. It has very limited knowledge of God derived by reason working in the realm of experience. Hume believed in the existence of an intelligent First Cause who set the universe in motion and placed it under the dominion of natural laws. But it is not possible to prove the existence of this Cause or to establish relations with it. Human affairs are not in any way directly influenced by the Deity. The practicalness of Hume's mind circumscribed and limited his experience and prevented him from sympathizing with the devotional aspects of religion. He saw very little value in acts of worship whether they were conducive to ethical behavior in the worshipper or not. Such ideas appeared to him to be enthusiasm and fanaticism. This was a serious limitation in Hume's view and largely accounts for his misunderstanding of the religious experience. Hume was not a religious man; consequently, the only questions on which he was qualified to speak were matters of doctrine in respect of their validity. He used as a test of this validity the tendency of doctrines to promote or discourage moral behavior. Conduct is made the final test of value and stress

is laid on the "moral" benefits which religion contributes to the experience of men.

The position which Hume advocated in religion contains implications which cannot be ignored. He made criticisms of theology which are relevent for present day theological systems. By means of Hume's criticisms considerable benefit was conferred on religious thought. In shaking the theologian's confidence in the authority of human reason and exposing its unreliableness as the sole instrument of knowledge, Hume rendered a service to religion. Belief and faith were given a place of prominence. By attacking the rationalistic attempt to prove religion by miracles, Hume compelled the Church to re-examine her lines of defence and to adopt other methods of apologetics. He pointed out the error of trying to make religion rely on external credentials. It must have an intrinsic value; its validity cannot be established by a reasoned appeal to inerrant and infallible books, nor by an attempt to prove rationally the miraculous origin of the faith. Due to Hume's arguments theologians found it necessary to make their appeal for Christianity by pointing to what it does for man. Religion came to be judged in terms of its contributions to the moral and material improvement of the world. These fruitful suggestions came from a reading of Hume even though his criticism of traditional religious views caused him to be regarded as an atheist. In the light of his positive contribution to philosophy a reinterpretation of Hume's attitude towards religion should reveal some additional insights into the present day problems of theology.

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